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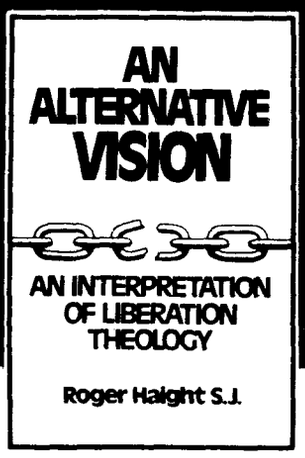

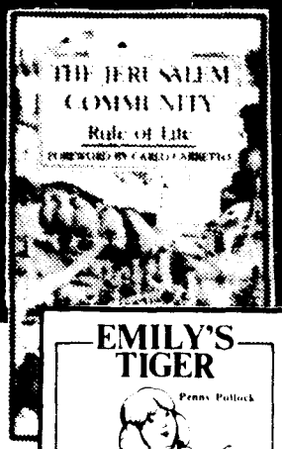

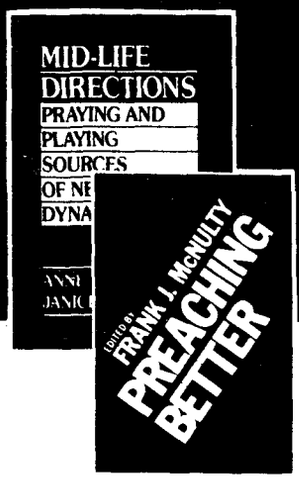

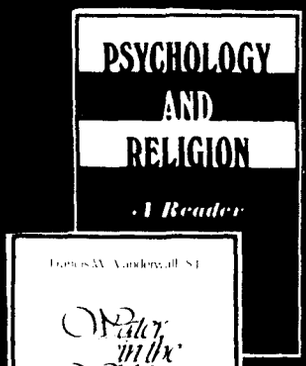

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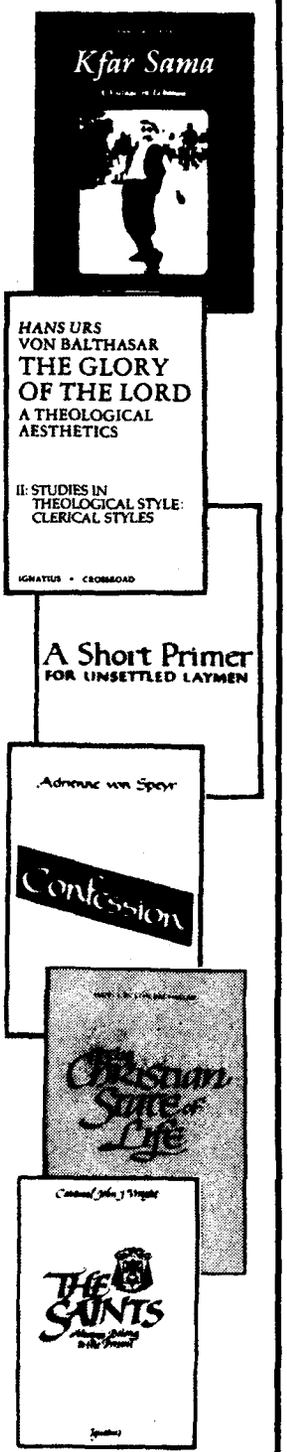

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Correspondence

Physicians' province

Cleveland, Ohio

To The Editors: My interest in the article entitled, "Diminishing Resources, Critical Choices," [March 8] turned to professional horror and disbelief as I began to understand Ms. Seiden's thesis. Am I to believe that she truly feels that the responsibility for the moral and ethical decisions as far as patients are concerned should become the priority of hospital administrative staff?

Certainly, as *The New England Journal of Medicine* letter section pointed out recently, being a medical ethicist (and, apparently, this writer is a doctoral candidate for such a degree) raises the question as to what qualifications and background even these people have.

To have the audacity to want to rewrite and redesign the true responsibilities for patient care, in all of its dimensions, which historically, professionally, and even morally comprise a physician's relationship to and with a patient and family, really is mind boggling. As I see it, the responsibilities of health care administrators, like this woman with or without her "ethical degree," are to provide the resources, the agencies, and the know-how to guarantee the housing, equipment, and pharmacology to treat each and every American at an appropriate level of medical care.

The moral and ethical dilemma that seems to be facing contemporary medicine is not new, in spite of the advances in biotechnology. This is the appropriate province of the practicing physician.

ROBERT J. WHITE, M.D.
Director of Neurosurgery
Metropolitan General Hospital

The author replies

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: My thanks to Dr. White for allowing me to clarify further some of the themes of my article. First, I am not advocating that hospital administrators be allowed greater power over critical decisions affecting the patients within their institutions. I am merely noting the fact that this has already happened, as Paul Starr pointed out in his book, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. This power shift has happened as a result of the tremendous changes in financing health care, which has turned it into the nation's third largest industry, consuming 10.9 percent of the Gross National Product in 1984. Given this national dollar commitment, inevitably power has come to those who control the dollars (administrators) and those who wish them to control more tightly (the government and the insurers).

The central concern of my article is that this shift in power is not accompanied by a shift in the training and direction of health-care administrators, that would enable them to deal more fully with the ethical side of the budgetary/policy decisions they are currently making, e.g. allocating clinical resources. My hope is to encourage dialogue within this newly empowered group, to allow the formulation of ethical parameters, and to change the training of administrators so that they may understand the impact their "business" decisions have on patients' lives and deaths and on physicians' ability to practice.

I could never advocate that ethical decision-making become the sole responsibility of any professional health group — administrator, physician, nurse, trustee, etc. All have major roles to play in forming moral standards in health care. I am *hoping* that administration can take a leadership role, as authorized by the legal governing agency, the boards of trustees, in assuring that the problems are formally addressed. However, the main reason I would never advocate that any health professional group control decision-making is my rather firm belief that all decisions in these matters *must* be made with the patient, and if appropriate, with the patient's family, for individual cases. For broad policy issues, the professional community must grapple with these questions with the larger community, through lay representatives on a hospital board, through the legislature, the courts, the clergy, and the whole range of organizations that represent the views of the larger society. Health professionals cannot mandate their views, however altruistic, upon their patients. The overall view I would advocate for relations between the public and the health professions is along the lines of a contractual model, urged by Robert Veatch in his book, *A Theory of Medical Ethics*.

Dr. White has some questions as to what a health care ethicist is, and who, in fact, I am. As to the former, I define ethics as the formal use of both reason and compassion to deal with conflicting and/or supplementing sets of values, with the goal of reaching a morally acceptable solution. Health care ethicists are trained to work within that definition on matters relating to (a) the health of individuals and (b) the policies of the institutions that mediate health. The correspondence in *The New England Journal of Medicine* which Dr. White mentions was in response to an article (Oct. 11, 1984) by health ethicist, Dr. Ruth Purtillo, attempting to put limits on what can reasonably be expected from this new profession, and what are some necessary safeguards. More recently, the same journal published a special report calling for medical ethics to be incorporated in the core of the medical school curriculum, and for the subject to be taught by both clinical specialists and ethicists, each complementing the other's knowledge. The article argued that "every physician should have access to ethical consultations for his or her more difficult cases," so that ethical and

(Continued on page 319)

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BITBURG & THE CENTURY OF ASH

THERE IS an ancient truism: we are what we eat. But in the latter half of the twentieth century it has been amended by a distinctly modern correlative: we are what we breathe. This is not a Victorian lament about the polluted skies of Liverpool, or Bhopal weeping its lethal tears. It is a reference to the most meticulously calculated and carefully executed of human disasters, the Nazi Holocaust of Jews and non-Jews alike.

When Pearl Herskovik arrived — a little girl — at the gates of Auschwitz, she asked where her family was. Someone pointed to the chimneys: "Look, there's where your father and whole family are." And, Ms. Herskovik recounted recently, "the ashes began to fall on my arm." The Nobel poet Nelly Sachs wrote of such a soul in her prize-winning collection, *O The Chimneys:*

Then she kisses the air-born being
And dies!

None of us knows for sure how much The Ash (the ash of the Holocaust) has settled in our souls. How can we calibrate what parts per billion still drift silently in the atmosphere? Has The Ash sifted down to cover the whole floor of the ocean's sands? And to what shores have the tides borne it? Does it lie sleeping in the mechanical air ducts of our mechanized bureaucratic halls? Did we eat it in the leaf of yesterday's lettuce? Will we smell it tomorrow in the rose — the rose we clamp into a wreath?

Of all the lessons of his presidency, the one we must not fail to heed is Ronald Reagan's stumbling at Bitburg. More truly than any moment in his tenure, it has revealed the president's deep inner human disconjunctions. In that sense, it reveals to each one of us our own hidden human face. The president's chief-of-staff has said that the uproar over Bitburg has deeply wounded the president. So it should. Such moments of self-revelation are a gift for self-knowledge. They can be an encounter with truth. Or they can be the occasion of ultimate evasion, the moment human pain settles for mere self-suffering. When former President Nixon counseled Mr. Reagan not to retreat from Bitburg lest he show weakness before the world, it was cruelly apparent Mr. Nixon himself had yet to learn the lessons of his own fall.

But two lessons should emerge from Bitburg. First, we cannot evade reality. As Americans, we have little stomach for prolonged, enduring suffering. When President Reagan chose not to go to Dachau as part of his initial itinerary, he was seeking, in the name of reconciliation with a German ally, to evade what Saul Friedländer has called the most extreme upheaval of our time, the "indelible reference point of Western imagination" *(Reflections on Nazism*, Harper & Row, $13.95, 141 pp.). There is no question as to the president's abhorrence of the Holocaust. Yet what has become apparent in his recent actions and unguarded phrases is what we secretly sense of ourselves. Like Mr. Reagan, we have a deep desire to be spared, to be rid of

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the unpleasant present and past. We go to great lengths to assure our personal contentment and its constitutionally guaranteed pursuit.

The second lesson is that we all tend to smooth out memory. The president's forte has never been getting the facts all straight. But suddenly the world found him, on the record, equating the sufferings of conscripted German soldiers with those of the victims of the SS. It was a morally indefensible equation, and came at a time when both the Vatican and President Betancur of Colombia were correcting Mr. Reagan and the White House for misrepresenting their particular views on resolving the conflicts in Central America. Memory, of its nature, tends to sand down the jagged incisors of history. But surely there is little need to hurry the process. Memory is the only practical muzzle we have discovered to guard human generations from so easily repeating our bloody past. The great blue banner raised in protest at Bitburg to greet the president was correct: "Neither hate nor forgetfulness."

In politics it is easiest to play politics. Lacking a politically unified Germany, Chancellor Kohl's desire for reconciliation led him to seek it in approval from abroad. To most Americans it was a surprising request, one they had granted a generation ago. But seeking such approval through a grand symbolic gesture has proven finally barren, had it ever been really possible. For only God and the dead can forgive the sins Mr. Kohl and we all long to be expiated. The wrong key never grants release. It may indeed further bar the way.

Mr. Kohl has won considerable favor from this administration by installing U.S. cruise missiles and supporting Mr. Reagan's Star Wars research. The U.S. air base at Bitburg is said to be the site of one of the largest concentrations of American nuclear weapons anywhere. Yet none of this can take away the fact that the Jewish cemetery in Bitburg is today tended by non-Jews. *There are no Jews left in Bitburg*. Surely, Elie Wiesel was correct when he insisted before the president that the issue was not one of politics, but of good and evil.

Perhaps, speaking as a prophet, Mr. Wiesel was too categorical, too simplistic. Yet the same newspapers that carried notices of the Bitburg controversy carried headlines of FBI agents and state troopers raiding neo-Nazi paramilitary compounds in the lush Ozark mountains, arresting fugitives from justice who had vowed to overturn the "Jewish-dominated" U.S. government. When Arkansas State Trooper William Young went before the cameras with a wooden practice target found in the Ozark compound, it was shaped in the form of a state trooper. But in place of a police badge it bore a Star of David.

Anti-Semitism, like the plague of seven-year locusts, constantly threatens to bore up out of the ground of our carefully hidden subconscious, to cover again the drowsy landscape of our century. Only vigilance will keep the volcanic ash from exploding. Some years ago when Lilian Cavani was asked by *Le Monde* why she had written *The Night Porter*, her play about the Nazis, she responded: "So that we can live wakefully." If there is one lesson we of the Century of Ash should ponder at the gates of Bitburg, it is unsparingly that.

FACING CONTRAQUENCES

Once again decisive action by the president has befuddled the less-than-decisive Congress. Mr. Reagan's well-timed May 1 trade embargo against Nicaragua was neither surprising nor original. Many in Congress had suggested it. Democrats who argued against giving military aid to the *contras* cited economic sanctions along with other nonmilitary alternatives. Some of these latter are now being considered by the president as well, such as a freeze on Nicaraguan assets in the U.S. and travel restrictions on U.S. citizens going to Nicaragua. Noticeably absent from this list, however, is the primary nonmilitary suggestion: direct negotiations with the Sandinistas, which, to Mr. Reagan's chagrin, the Sandinistas are anxious to resume.

The president's executive action appeared in reaction to the defeat in the House of a proposal to give $14 million in aid to the *contras*. The embargo distracted media from the president's other decisive commitment — to visit the cemetery in Bitburg. Is the embargo a media ploy? An illustration of executive command? A kick at an unheeled Congress?

Whatever the president's intention, the House is right to have denied funds for the rebels. Logic demanded it. The facts simply do not support Mr. Reagan's declaration of a "national emergency," nor can the Sandinistas be called "totalitarian" despite serious human rights abuses and curtailed civic freedoms. Most outrageous is the president's claim that recent actions by the Nicaraguan government "constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."

Even if all these allegations were true, the *contras* show no ability, with or without increased financial backing, to overthrow the Sandinistas. And even if they could, there is no reason to believe they enjoy a majority of popular support, or that they are competent to lead a fledgling democracy.

While the embargo is admittedly and laudably a nonmilitary and overt move, the logic beneath it is equally feeble. First, an embargo needs international support. This embargo is a unilateral step taken by the president of the U.S., whose allies apparently do not take seriously the urgent security threat. Mr. Reagan acted against his own expressed intentions: on April 23 he wrote to Congress, via Senator Dole, that the administration will "favorably consider economic sanctions against the Government of Nicaragua and will undertake multilateral consultations with other Central American states in this regard." Finally, no one predicts that the sanctions will succeed.

But facts like these apparently count for little. Despite appearances to the contrary, even the Democrats in Congress are now more supportive of Mr. Reagan's view of the "covert" war and U.S. intervention than in the past. Otherwise, how can we account for their refusal to take credit and satisfaction for defeating *contra* funding and nudging the president toward nonmilitary pressure? Why has Congress moved from banning all aid for the rebels to haggling over who should receive aid, how it should be spent, and who should

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distribute monies? "Oregta's trip to Moscow triggered a reaction in the House and provides overwhelming support for the need to show the flag," says Rep. Alexander of Arkansas.

Reaction to the Moscow trip is symptomatic of a new intellectual and political morass which sucks down logic like quicksand. The morass is filled with accumulated suspicion over the "covert" nature of the war; embarrassment over CIA involvement in mining Nicaragua's harbors; private fortunes collected to bolster the rebels; and the recent history of U.S.-Soviet interventions in the affairs of sovereign nations.

This morass accounts for the fact that while the Democrats are suspicious of Mr. Reagan's unstated motives in Nicaragua, they are downright appalled by Nicaraguan President Ortega's recent visit to Moscow to solicit aid. The Sandinistas' need for financial support is obvious, and yet that cannot dispel Congress's shock at watching their growing dependence upon the Soviet Union as the source.

Nevertheless, reversing the vote on aid to the *contras* — a move now being contemplated — merely sidesteps the problem. What is needed is a way to relieve tension and to check Nicaragua's dependence upon the Soviets.

At the very least the Democrats should stick with the facts: there is no "national emergency." They should spearhead a moratorium on all U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, for a specified time, expressly to allow the neglected Contadora leaders to work out a regional solution. Granted, this leaves the *contras* high and dry, but a moratorium would test the actuality and degree of their popular support. Private U.S. funds to prop up either side should be forbidden by law and enforced. Meanwhile, the CIA can occupy itself by investigating who mysteriously supplied surface-to-air missiles to the rebels precisely when Mr. Reagan was sulking over non-acceptance of his Nicaraguan "peace initiative"; the embargo was announced; and one reason given was Nicaragua's "rapid and destabilizing military buildup."

Applying the pastoral

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

BRINGING THE LIGHT TO G.E.

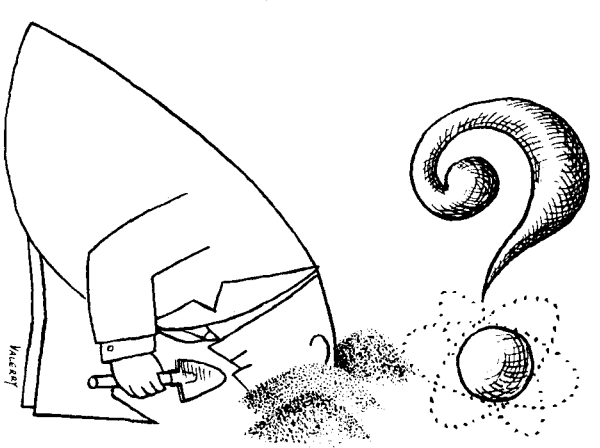
A GREAT DEAL has been written in the past year and a half about the peace pastoral of the Catholic bishops. It has weathered criticism from both the right and left, yet stands as a thoughtful, realistic assessment of the nuclear arms race from the perspective of Catholic teaching. The question remains as to its impact. Has it penetrated the consciousness of Catholics? Are they bringing its principles to bear on American institutions and policy-makers?

One group of Connecticut Catholics has taken the pastoral to heart — and to the corporate headquarters of the General Electric Company in suburban Fairfield County. Calling themselves the "Good Things Committee," a play on the GE jingle about bringing "good things to life," the group is protesting GE's extensive involvement in nuclear weapons production. Now the fourth-ranking weapons manufacturer in the country, GE makes parts for the MX, Trident II missiles, the B-1 bomber, the Trident submarine, and a host of other weapons including the Mark 21 re-entry vehicle for nuclear warheads.

The extraordinary accuracy of the MX and Trident II allows them to be aimed at Soviet missile sites in what is called counterforce strategy. This policy threatens the Soviet Union's retaliatory capacity and, in so doing, undermines deterrence. The bishops are unwilling to accept such a threat to deterrence because it destabilizes the relationship between the two superpowers. Producing these new weapons will escalate the arms race and create still another obstacle to nuclear disarmament which is the bishops' ultimate goal.

That, at least, is the highly plausible interpretation of the pastoral that the "Good Things Committee" has tried to translate into a message to GE, frequently standing in vigil at the entrance to the company's corporate headquarters. The committee numbers about sixty-five persons and few of them have ever picketed or demonstrated before. With signs and banners they stand quietly in front of GE sharing with each other a common feeling: "I can't believe I'm really here doing this." It doesn't fit the pattern of suburban Catholic life. These are middle-class, professional people who are otherwise indistinguishable from their Fairfield County neighbors. But most have come to a knowledge of the arms race through programs on the pastoral in their parish churches.

Lest the demonstrators form a negative impression of the corporation, GE always sends out two executives to greet the group and assure them — as well as the local media present — that GE is committed to peace. "We just differ on the means, and that's what democracy's all about." To hear the company's representatives explain it, building bombs is somehow just as peaceful an activity as standing in vigil against building bombs. After all, said the GE emissaries, "we want the same thing you do." The bishops might have hard questions about the connection between peace and the new weapons, but apparently these executives do not.



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When the demonstrators and the reporters did not succumb to the public relations approach, the corporation agreed to a meeting inside its headquarters where representatives of the Good Things Committee were invited to present their position directly to company executives. Four members of the committee argued the case against GE's weapons from separate perspectives: a biologist explained the "nuclear winter" syndrome — the fact that even a very limited nuclear exchange would create disastrous ecological conditions; a physician described the impossible medical consequences of a nuclear conflict; a theology instructor outlined the teachings of the churches on the issue; and the author, a political scientist, detailed the strategic objections to the MX and the Trident II. The group also pointed out to company executives that, with a growing public awareness of the arms race, GE's weapons could create a serious public relations problem for the company. The focus, however, was on the moral issue: given the biological, medical, and strategic consequences of first-strike weapons, how does the company justify their production? What is the moral position of GE?

The response was disquieting: we're not responsible because it's the government that asks us to do this. Throughout the conversation the GE representatives emphasized that they were religious people, practicing members of their churches and concerned about moral values. Yet, they apparently would not consider any connection between those personal values and the weapons work of their firm. They felt no ready need to use their own moral criteria in thinking about the weapons systems their company was making. Indeed, they seemed to insist on not doing so.

According to the GE executives neither they nor their company feels responsibility for the policies that these first-strike weapons might serve. Indeed, one company representative repeated that it would be wrong for the company to deny its expertise to the government. GE would build whatever weapons Washington requested, provided they were economically and technologically feasible for the firm. It's not the duty of the company to consider the government's policy, said the GE group. Responsibility rests *only* in Washington.

"Would there ever be a time when GE would refuse a request by the government?" the executives were asked. "That's hypothetical!" said a GE vice-president who seemed especially upset with the question. "We don't deal in hypotheticals." It was pointed out that the MX and the other weapons were not hypothetical and deserved a judgment by the company. None was forthcoming. In frustration, the physician pointed out that some firm had made the gas ovens for Hitler. "What would you do," he asked, "if you were requested to construct structures like that for the government? What would your response be?" The answer of one General Electric executive was simply this: "We'd have to go back to the company for further guidance on that." His colleagues nodded in agreement.

Not one explained in his own religious or moral categories why GE's weapons production was appropriate. Not one assumed moral responsibility, either for himself or for the corporation. To my mind, each had clearly ceded that part of himself and his organization to the government, and believed strongly in doing so.

The bishops see it very differently. Near the end of the peace pastoral (paragraph 318) they address themselves specifically to "men and women in defense industries." The paragraph refers frequently to the need to make a choice, to form one's conscience to make a personal judgment. The bishops recognize that different choices might be made in answering the question of participating in weapons production. They appreciate and accept such diversity as the result of individual

'BRINGING UP DADDY'

TELLING TALES TO CHILDREN

ODD AS IT sounds, I make my living talking about stories. I actually get paid for standing in front of a bunch of nice young men and women to discuss things like Fielding's comic vision or Lear's moral growth. It's indoor work with no heavy lifting, and I always enjoy it.

So when our daughter was born I naturally looked forward to discovering some new stories and returning to some long-forgotten ones. With a year of baby books under my belt I'm ready to get up in front of people to discuss them.

I enjoy the way kids' books play with language. Babies are natural poets and our daughter fills in the rhyming words enthusiastically. "By the light of the . . ." "Moon." "By the light of the . . ." "Star." "They walked all . . ." "Night." "From near to . . ." "Far." This love of rhymes is an exciting development, because before long we can work up to the more complicated poetry of Bruce Springsteen. She already understands how important Springsteen is.

"Kaitlin, who's the Boss?"

"Boos."

"That's right, Kaitlin. Bruce is the Boss."

To encourage a child's pleasure with words, Dr. Seuss is pretty good. Except that he cheats, poetically speaking, by building rhymes around creatures' names: Zans opens cans, Mr. Gump rides a Wump. I wish Dr. Seuss would stick with lambs and cows, or invent clever rhymes for zebra and rhinoceros.

Children's books have strangely similar endings. Let's examine some sample endings and pose a question I ask in English class: how does the ending address and/or resolve the issues raised by the story?

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moral autonomy. But they insist that there *is* a moral judgment to be made by individuals in the defense industry and nuclear weapons production. The reason, the bishops argue, is the nature of such weaponry. Those involved in its production "face specific questions because the defense industry is directly involved in the development and production of the weapons of mass destruction." That fact requires moral choice, a choice that the General Electric representatives must not refuse to recognize.

The bishops' approach is not a new one; it is basic to the Judaeo-Christian tradition which makes the individual ultimately responsible for his or her actions. The GE executives attempted to lift that responsibility from the person and place it on impersonal government bureaucracy. It was the Nuremberg defense revisited: we are not responsible because the government asked us to do it. It is the kind of thinking which permits holocausts for which no one is responsible. As Daniel Berrigan has said, "When the button is finally pushed it will be a legal act."

KEVIN J. CASSIDY

(Kevin J. Cassidy is assistant professor of politics at Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut.)

"Shhh. Don't make a sound. Everyone is sleeping . . . except the mouse" *(Pigs Say Oink)*. "Goodnight, little bird," she called. "I will play with you tomorrow" *(Miffy in the Snow)*. "Good night, Mother dear." "Good night, little bear. Sleep well" *(Little Bear)*.

Although these endings appear to have a pretty clear purpose, some kids' books can fool you. According to my wife I have been misreading *Goodnight Moon* for six months. I always assume that the story is spoken by an omniscient narrator, somebody warm and wise and sweet, somebody who closely resembles Kaitlin's Daddy. My wife has a totally different interpretation, and it's shaken me up. She says the narrator is the bunny rabbit lying in bed and spinning out rhymes to avoid going to sleep. I'll have to rethink *Goodnight Moon*. My Baby Bunny voice isn't as convincing as my Omniscient Daddy voice.

Another ending worth careful attention is the denouement of *Spot's First Walk*. Spot's Mommy sends Spot on a walk, and he sticks his nose into *everything*. Into a chicken coop, behind a fence, into a shed, up a tree, and into a garden. He finds a bone, a carrot, and several surprises. When he returns home, in the very last scene, Spot's Mommy asks him, "What *have* you been doing, Spot?" And Spot says, "Nothing." Now a naive reader might take that "Nothing" at face value. But the careful re-reader thinks, "Nothing! Ha! A likely story — tell me another one — hardeharhar!"

What Spot has done, notice, is to give a textbook illustration of *irony*: "saying one thing and meaning another." Our daughter at twenty months already has a highly-refined sense of irony. Although we have resolved to be the first academic parents in the history of civilization not to describe their kid as "precocious," I occasionally ask her to strut her stuff.

"Kaitlin, show the Beckers how you count to ten."

"Wan, Two . . ."

"One, Two . . . what comes after two?"

"Five."

Here, our daughter shows a sophisticated sense of humor, regularly foiling the expectations of the audience. The Beckers, incidentally, were very impressed that Kaitlin got to five in only an hour and a half.

Another pleasure of children's books is that the characters usually treat each other kindly. After closing *Sons and Lovers* or *A Passage to India*, it's heartening to open *Little Bear*. Everybody comes to Little Bear's party and Mother Bear bakes a cake and says, "I promise never to forget your birthday." It's so nice that I'm only mildly annoyed about the privileged position Mothers occupy in all these stories. Even in *Peter Pan*, where the Mother doesn't ever appear. Peter introduces Wendy to the Little Lost Boys by saying, "She can be your Mother." "What's a Mother?" they ask. So Peter sings a tune about how great Moms are. Sappiest song since Debbie Reynolds's "Tammy." Hey, I'm all for Moms — some of my favorite people are Moms — but a little dose of this stuff could give you diabetes.

I'm not complaining, but it took a whole year before my daughter even noticed that she had a Dad. It's not easy staying cool while your baby carries on shamelessly with somebody else. Every once in a while she'd glance up from this blissful little tête-à-tête with her Yummy Mummy, and she'd notice this pathetic ole guy hanging around twiddling his thumbs whistling "Dixie." Now, at last, *I* get to do things like play "Attack of the Tickle Monster" or read *Goodnight Moon*. And what are all the stories about, besides going to sleep? They're about how great *Mom* is.

Fortunately, I'm a fast reader and fairly quick on my feet, even when I'm sitting on my fanny. What I do is — shhh, don't tell anybody — I *change* the stories a wee bit. I got the idea of changing the story when I was reading *Bambi* and found this unbelievable scene in which a forest fire offs Bambi's Mom. Although I am tired of stories about how great Mom is, I don't see the point in *wiping out* Mom. So I made a creative maneuver, left out the fire, and said Bambi's Mom was at The Clip Shop for two days waiting for her appointment.

Well, once I discovered how easy it is to improvise, I began making other little substitutions. It's amazing how many stories we have that show a little girl just how great Dad is.

ROBERT H. BELL

(Robert H. Bell teaches English at Williams College, and airs his humor on National Public Radio.)

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Of several minds: *John Garvey*

THE LAST SOLITUDE

ARE WE HONEST ABOUT DEATH & DYING?

DURING HOLY WEEK this year I thought — not surprisingly, I guess — about death. Traditional religions have been accused of making us all conscious of our guilts, of playing on our fears of death and what may follow death. And it is true that no religion ignores this dreadful subject; all great traditions deal with death in a way which is closer to a stammer than to clarity. What they have in common is something we take so much for granted that we may not see how odd it is for human beings from all of the major religious traditions to share this one perception: the way we live has something to do with how we die, with what death will mean for us.

Secularists — which is to say, most people in their ordinary ways of viewing these things, whether they are consciously secularist or not — exhibit a different attitude. It is hard to speak simply about it because there is no secular church, no common voice or authority which can say what matters from a secular point of view. But the attitude in the air, the sensibility that reflects the assumptions which drive the age (this sensibility can't, almost by definition, be as clearly articulated as belief), is that death is an interruption, an accident, something which must be postponed and avoided and challenged wherever it can be. As something which reveals us as we truly are it works only insofar as it shows the bravery of, for example, the terminal cancer victim or the person who has the time to display courage before the assembled family.

That death itself might have a significance beyond the one which offers the dying person a setting in which to die dramatically, interestingly, heroically — this is not part of the way we ordinarily regard the one thing which all of us can count on. Secularism has decided that what we have come to call "this life" is the only one which matters; and the reason is that it is really the only life which exists at all. Death itself is a blank, a backdrop against which the important drama is acted. Death can tell us nothing about life, except by way of reaction.

There is something unavoidably blank about death. None of us has been there; none of us can say what it is like. I discount the stories told by people who have seen the tunnel of light and all that; there has been enough oxygen left in their brain cells to allow them to experience such sensations. In fact no one with a straight line on the EEG has come back to say anything at all.

Most Christians and most more or less secular people who cherish some idea of an afterlife make an identification of the mind — that is, the part of us that has memories and tastes, affections and aversions — with the soul, the part that is supposed to hang around somewhere after the body is gone. The ancient division of the human being into a three-part rather than a two-part reality (aside from having a nice trinitarian feel to it, making it appealing to Christians) was probably closer to whatever may turn out to be the case. In shoving "mind" and "spirit" into the same category we have created some real problems. But when we don't, we face a scary mystery. That is probably the better place for us to be.

If I assume that whatever survives my death will be a sort of me-without-a-body (an entity which doesn't sweat or need haircuts or have problems with flatulence but which does remember how nice the sun felt one day in July or how noble the causes I cared about were), if I think that whatever I will be after I am dead has much to do with what I think of now as "me," I am, among other things, ignoring some very impressive evidence. One bunch of evidence comes from science. That may be enough to discredit it with fundamentalists, but not with me.

Strokes can cancel out a lot of what we think of as the self. Brain damage does to those memories what electrical surges do to information in a computer, and to ask "where did that information go?" may properly be answered "nowhere." It may be possible to think of a kind of heavenly account where all those earthly cancellations wind up, bit by bit, until the heart's stopping tosses the balance over the wall into whatever stores all that stuff on the other side. I would hate for Christians to have to depend on this sort of thinking to shore up their belief, though. It doesn't do a thing for mine.

For years now various Christian theologians have been trying to point out the fact that the New Testament does not tell us to believe in something as abstract and finally indefinable as "the immortality of the soul." Instead, it says that Christ is risen, and this tells us something about what we will be. What it tells us is less precise than we would like, and this has led fundamentalists to search Scripture in their usual unimaginative way for descriptions of the length of heaven and the kinds of clothes we will get to wear, leading to pictures which make what happens to us after death look like a visit to a particularly boring sort of theme park. Preachers who rely on this tactic should be warned; I have met people who have left behind all ideas of eternal life because of their fear that it will be in some way "more of the same" — more of this life, even if it is this life clothed in white robes and walking on streets of gold, which, after all, would get boring after about five minutes.

But people who think they have gone beyond this and talk instead about "heightened experiences" or something of that sort should realize that they are doing more of the same sort of thing, with California accents. What death means is what it seems to mean: an ultimate cancellation of everything we thought we were about, the end of everything we want to hold on to, whether white robes or profound experiences.

The responses we make to this absolute blank reveal a lot. The secular an-

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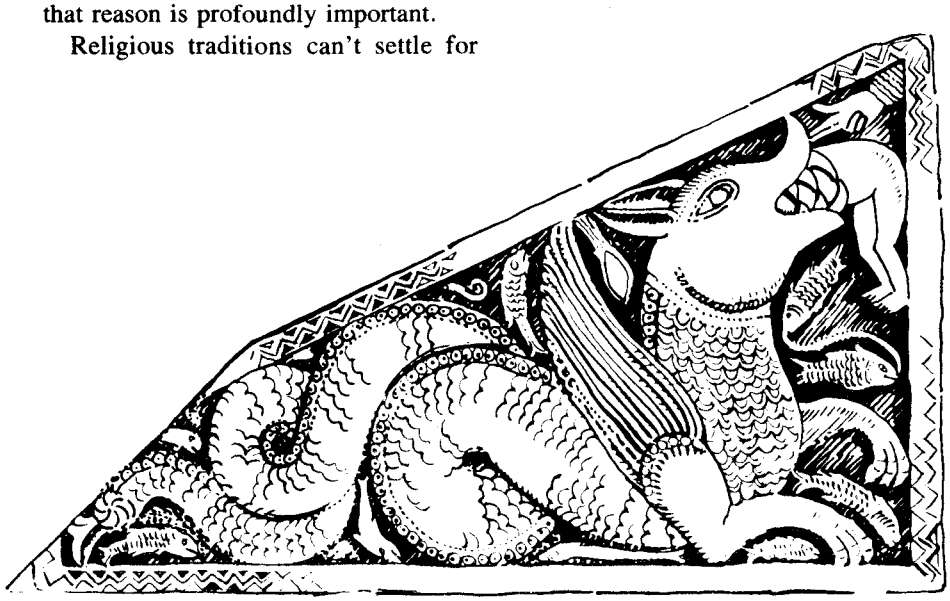
swer reveals the secular belief that life is what we know it to be, even granted the fact that we may be surprised by our capacities; and this is why stories of courage and displays of good character in the face of extinction are so moving from the secular point of view (and from any other point of view, for that matter). Buddhism answers with a questioning of our desire to hold on to particular images of the self, making of the self a solid and subsistent thing, and therefore dooming us to tragedy. Once we know that this is an illusion, our grasping will not anchor us to an inevitably tragic destiny; but this knowledge must be a transforming thing, not merely an intellectual acknowledgment. Judaism offers us the example of Job, and the paradox of a God who answers Job's anguished questions with still more questions — questions which really are better than Job's, and are probably the most majestic and wonderful example in history of putting someone in his place. God's answer to Job includes a rebuke to Job's comforters, who are accused of not being quite honest. (We need more of that.)

WHERE THE religious response to death differs from the secular response is in the religious assumption that what we regard as life is only a part of our reality. Secularism stresses what we can know: this is *our* triumph. If the presence of death underscores that knowledge, it stretches our present awareness, and for that reason is profoundly important.

Religious traditions can't settle for this. Death not only tells us what we are moving towards, or what the backdrop is; death, from a religious point of view, is part of the definition. Buddhism suggests that the fear of death is part of a complex web of understandings which are themselves part of the problem — including our attraction to the idea that a noble death is impressive. What does that death preserve? If we hope that it preserves something we are on the wrong track; if we think that death dissolves something we are also on the wrong track, since there is really not a single thing, a subsistent entity, which goes through the process of dying. Judaism preserves the mystery of the source of our being here without answering any of our questions about it. That is certainly important both to the Jewish opposition to idolatry and to the connection Christians need to make between the Judaism we come from and the doctrines we speak about too easily. In the case of two very different traditions, Buddhism and Judaism, death tells something about the nature of our relationship with a universe which is ordered in ways we are not capable of comprehending.

Is it possible to believe that Jesus is risen, that Christ is Lord, and also take to heart the unknowing which must form any true and non-idolatrous response to death? If our response is designed simply to comfort us, to serve as a security blanket against the inevitable cancellation we'd rather not think about, it isn't any more worthy of adults than belief in Santa Claus. To the extent that religion is part of filling that need it deserves all the cynicism atheists bring to it.



When Jesus approached Lazarus's tomb, he wept. At the garden of Gethsemane, needing human companionship, he found himself alone before God (a radical solitude which would have been there even if his friends had found it possible to stay awake) and, according to Scripture, "his soul was filled with dismay and dread." He asked that the horror would be lifted from him. It wasn't. His prayers, from the only point of view we can possibly understand, were answered with silence.

I find this much more helpful than all of the stuff which would reconcile me to the fact that someday I may die before the people I love do, or they may die before I do, and some of us will be left feeling torn open. There is no Christian doctrine which says we have to feel good about what life deals us. What we are told is that "we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). We have hope through being baptized into that life, and have no right to any information beyond the staggering news we have been shown in Jesus' Resurrection.

The comparisons which are made between growing plants, children in the mother's womb, things growing in the dark waiting still to be revealed — all of this has to do with the nature of our present consciousness. It is impossible for us to know what the cancellations involved in death and suffering mean in any but the most tentative and awkward ways. All we know is that they cause us pain. We have, after that, Jesus appearing as a stranger to the disciples walking towards Emmaus, known to them in the breaking of the bread.

There is an irreverence involved in trying to imagine much more than this. Imagining isn't the point, rather it is the more sober and infinitely more hope-filled work of trying to receive everything that we have been given.

JOHN GARVEY

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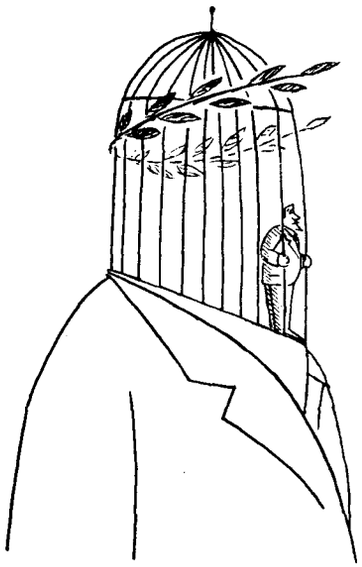

With blood & indelible ink

BORIA SAX

SENTENCED on December 15, 1980 to six years in a labor camp plus five years of internal exilé for "anti-Soviet slander" because of his poems and essays, the Lithuanian author Gintas Iesmantis continues to write poetry in prison. By doing this — as well as by continuing to protest his detention — he risks a possible prolongation of his sentence. Iesmantis has been forbidden to practice his art and new legislation enacted in 1983 makes it possible for prison authorities to extend by up to five years the sentences of inmates whom they consider uncooperative.

Accustomed as we are to an extremely trivialized view of the arts, people in the West will respond to such defiance with a mixture of awe and bewilderment. It is a reproach to us, a reminder of how insignificant we have allowed poetry to become in our society. In the United States today widespread fear has been expressed that the very existence of the arts in our society could be threatened by a few paltry cutbacks in federal aid. At the same time, the gesture of Iesmantis reassures us by affirming the worth and durability of the poetic vocation. It is even uplifting to note that people can still feel threatened by poetry enough to jail others for producing it.

And is Iesmantis a great poet? The intensity of such a commitment suggests that perhaps he could be. We can't know. As of yet, none of his literary work has reached the West. A few moving letters from him have been published as samizdat. Writing of the camp, he says: "The windows are half covered with snow. You look outside and remember a snowy, windblown childhood. We are surrounded by forests; they say there are many raspberries. Of course, not for us."

One way or another, there is a good chance that some poems of Iesmantis will eventually find their way to the West. Then, despite being written in a comparatively obscure language, they will receive attention from the exile community and, most probably, the literary public at large. But there are others in comparable circumstances who have taken similar risks without even the hope of such remote and questionable rewards. The journalist Eduardo Galeano has told of poems written on cigarette papers and anonymously smuggled out of Uruguay's notoriously brutal Penal de Libertad. These are not the work of intellectuals but of common people. For the most part, they are vignettes of everyday life, expressed with directness and simplicity, such as the following by an anonymous Uruguayan prisoner:

> To have a quick word with the bee
> in its buzzing flight
> to tell the ant to hurry
> with the bread
> for his lady wife
> to contemplate the spider
> and admire the beauty
> of its amazing feet
> and beg it
> to climb more slowly up its web
> all these are ways
> of resisting

What drove the authors to take the risks involved in writing these poems and smuggling them out? Whatever the reason, it would appear not to be fundamentally political. They do not document in detail the tortures that are practiced. They do not concentrate on attacking the government. Perhaps they were merely intended to establish some human contact with the outside world.

It is common for prisoners, most especially political prisoners, to be forbidden to write while in prison. I want to be very careful in distinguishing this prohibition from censorship. A person is censored when he or she is forbidden from publishing certain works, usually on account of their content. The prohibition here goes far beyond censorship. An individual is forbidden from writing at all, regardless of what the content might be.

BORIA SAX, *a poet, scholar, and human rights activist, is the author of several books including* East German Love Poetry *(Bouvier, Bonn, W. Germany) and, most recently, a collection of translations from East German poet Lutz Rathenow.*

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Kim Dae Jung, for example, when imprisoned in South Korea, was not permitted to keep a journal or to take notes. As a compromise, he offered to turn whatever he might write over to the guards. Even with this provision, permission was still denied. Kim was, it is true, allowed to write one letter to his family every month. On one occasion, he included a poem in one of his letters. The censor returned the letter and he was forced to erase the poem. The reason was not directly political. It was, in Kim's words: "Because a poem . . . is usually an expression of emotions . . . and it can influence others . . . how they think and feel."

There are several examples apart from that of Iesmantis of political prisoners who have defied prison authorities by continuing to write. Solzhenitsyn would compose stories, word for word, in his head, then write them down later from memory. The Venezuelan poet Ali Lameda, after being deprived of writing implements, mentally composed several hundred sonnets while imprisoned in North Korea from 1967 to 1974. It seems likely that the strict control imposed by the sonnet form may have given him the discipline necessary to survive.

Armando F. Valladares was arrested in 1960 for his nonviolent opposition to the Cuban revolution. After a few years of confinement, he took up poetry. He was to continue this pursuit in defiance of the guards throughout the rest of his twenty-one years of imprisonment, despite torture, solitary confinement, and other punishments. His poem "The Best Ink" is a testament to fortitude and freedom:

> They have taken everything away from me
> pens
> pencils
> ink
> because they do not want me to write
> and they have buried me
> in this punishment cell
> but they will not stifle
> my rebellion
> this way
> they have taken everything away from me
> Well, almost everything—
> for I still have my smile
> my pride in feeling a free man
> and in my soul a garden
> of small, undying flowers
> they do not want me to write
> They took away the pens
> the pencils
> but I still have life's ink
> my own blood
> and with it I can still write poems

Valladares managed to smuggle several of his poems out of prison, a collection of which entitled *From My Wheelchair* was published in 1976.

It might seem presumptuous to draw analogies from my own experience, since I have never known anything at all comparable to the prisons in which these men were confined. Nevertheless, some comparisons do suggest themselves. I can remember when I wrote poetry, supporting myself with any menial job that I could find. I would come home, exhausted and drained emotionally after eight to ten hours of hard labor, to devote the evening to the even more intense chore of writing. The circumstances gave the task of writing poetry a special intensity. Because of it I felt that I could encounter anyone — regardless of social position — on equal terms. If I had written nothing during the day, I would postpone going to bed until that was accomplished. During breaks on the job, I would jot down lines in a notebook.

The act of writing when conducted in circumstances like those of a prison camp is reduced to something elemental. It is an almost primordial impulse which one sees most clearly when all of the other motivations — fame, money, political influence — are stripped away. It is an act by which an author affirms his or her essential worth and thereby that of all human beings. One can see the reason why poetry is found in virtually all cultures and under such a wide variety of circumstances.

To prevent an author from writing is to attack his essential dignity as a human being. A person who is censored is prevented from publishing but is still able to produce art, still able to retain the sense of worth which the calling confers. Of course, prohibitions against writing and publishing go hand in hand. If one writes at all, the probability is that one will try to pass the literary work on. At the very least, it will probably be shown to family or friends. And circulation of samizdat is merely an extension of this natural gesture.

Many — in fact, most — governments exercise considerable control over what is published. I do not know of any government that has gone to the extent of forbidding unimprisoned citizens to write, though regulations mandated by some come close. In Cambodia under Pol Pot a systematic liquidation of literate individuals was carried out.

In Romania legislation passed in 1982 restricts the ownership and use of typewriters to those specifically authorized by the local militia. Even those allowed to possess typewriters may only use them for the purpose given at the time of authorization. Owners are required to report all servicing and repairs. To make sure that any manuscript can be traced, owners must submit a file card every year with all of the letters and numbers it produces. Writers also have to contend with a shortage of paper, most of which is allocated for purposes that meet with government approval. What will come next? Will people be required to register all pens and account for the expenditure of ink? I sometimes wonder what the state of literature must be like in Romania under such restrictions. But I feel more sorrow for the suffering of the writers than for the literature itself. The literature will continue. It always has.

It might seem simple enough for Iesmantis to comply with Soviet authorities — just for a while — to win his release. He could stop writing poetry and protesting his confinement. Call it foolish, stubborn, or heroic. Call it humanitarian or vain. But what drives him to such a refusal is the poetic impulse — something that serious authors will recognize. Even today, it can inspire loyalty and fear.

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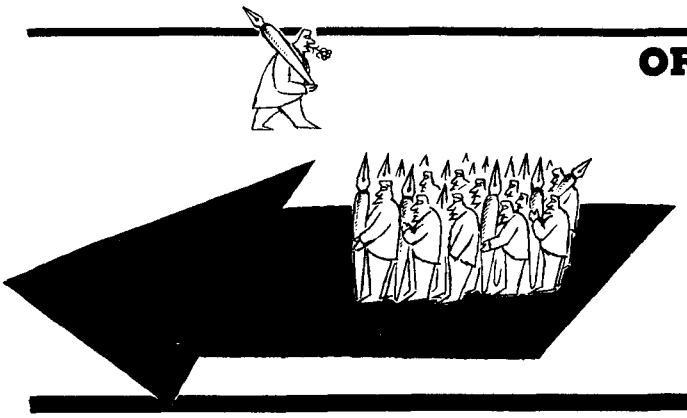

The writer & the cuttlefish

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM

SINCERITY is a word that lacks punch. To call Mother Teresa sincere would be to damn with faint praise; to end a letter "Sincerely yours" is the meekest of conventions. Yet, as Lionel Trilling argued in his 1969-1970 Norton Lectures "Sincerity and Authenticity" (published under the same title by Harvard University Press in 1972), sincerity entered the English language in the sixteenth century and remained a vital concept until near modern times. The word sincerity was first used for things ("this is a sincere wine"), but was soon applied to people. In the latter usage it took on a particular meaning: the absence of dissimulation or feigning or pretense. The sincere person was the opposite of the dissembler, the mask wearer, the villain. The sincere person spoke the truth about himself and about the world. Sincerity was honesty, not only about the self, but about the self in relation to others.

In rereading Trilling recently it struck me that sincerity, understood in that moral sense with its original gravity, is an apt adjective to describe the late Eric Blair aka George Orwell. Since 1984 is now behind us it might be well to look back on Orwell without the attendant clamor of an anniversary year. Let it be understood in advance that this act of homage, for the relief of those whose eyes glaze over at yet another apocalyptic article on Big Brother, will make only passing reference to you-know-which novel.

I do not intend to portray Orwell, as did his faithful friend the late Sir Richard Rees, as a secular saint. It does seem clear to me that there are few people in modern letters whose life and art were so clearly related: who he was and how he perceived himself was never at odds with what he wrote. At one level one could say as much about the Marquis De Sade if one took sincerity to be the same as self-revelatory honesty. Sincerity, in its deepest sense, however, has a profoundly moral side to it. Moral sincerity takes seriously the sense of the seif in relation to a larger human community.

Orwell was professedly a man of the Left. His social program for England would still warm the heart of Mister Tony Benn. What saved Orwell from being a strident ideologue was his persistence in articulating political positions with a steady eye on the individual. Misuse of people, not of orthodoxies, outraged him. It hardly needs demonstration that Orwell hated the power of bureaucratic oppression in modern political systems. That hatred was allied to his equal hatred for the oppressive power of political abstraction. However much he loathed class privilege and the poverty of the poor which he thought sprang from it, his loathing was always focused on what class did to this or that individual. It was a hatred mixed with a profound compassion. One sees that clearly in those small epiphanies in which a close portrait of common human life is brought forth to argue a central moral point. None of the facts or statistics in *The Road to Wigan Pier* illuminates working class poverty in the England of the 1930s as compellingly as vignettes like:

> . . . the dumpy shawled women, with their sacking aprons and their heavy black clogs, kneeling in the cindery mud and the bitter wind, searching eagerly for chips of coal. They are glad enough to do it. In Winter they are desperate for fuel; it is more important almost than food. Meanwhile all round, as far as the eye can see, are the slag heaps and hoisting gear of collieries, and not one of those collieries can sell all the coal it is capable of producing.

These women do not stand as emblems of poverty; they are real people who really suffer; there is flinty pain in those lines. Orwell is openly hostile to those who would either patronize or rationalize that kind of poverty. A subtheme of *The Road to Wigan Pier* is its disgust with a Chestertonian vision of the poor as happy and snug in their grime. Not for him are evasions about quaffing beer, good peasant bread, and a Distributist fancy about backyard gardens.

Orwell came back to the experience of poverty again and again. He begins *The Road to Wigan Pier* from a train window, viewing a woman attempting to unclog a drainpipe in the yard of her squalid row house. She is a sister to those women who culled coal in Lancashire. His glimpse of her is fleeting but "what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her — understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drainpipe."

I would like to suggest that Orwell's close observation of the particular for a moral purpose is linked to, and derived from, his lifelong desire to write in as clear and unadorned a prose

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM *is professor of religion at the Florida State University, Tallahassee. His most recent book, from Crossroad, is* The Catholic Heritage.

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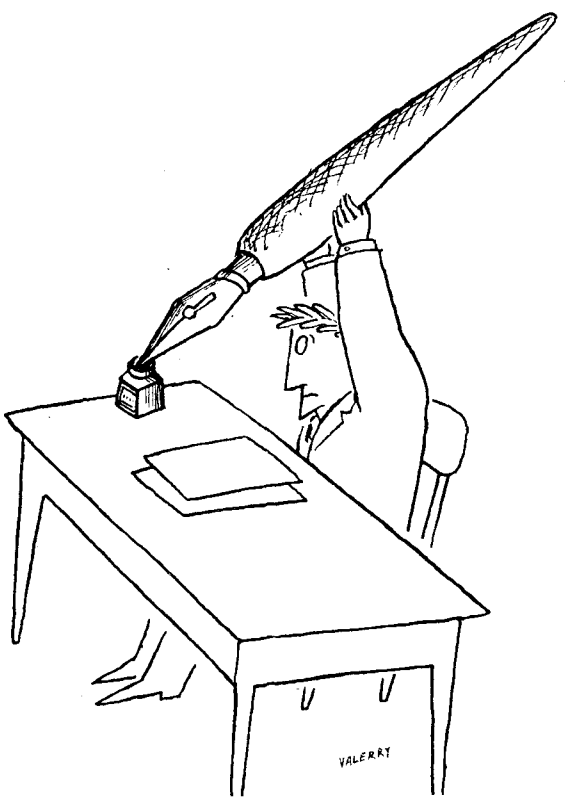
style as possible. For Orwell the cleansing of language from Latinate flourishes and donnish ornaments was not merely a rejection of class language. His insight was that clear language and revolution in thought is at least as old as *The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* when Wordsworth and Coleridge issued their manifesto in favor of demotic speech. To write clearly and plainly was both a blow struck against class distinction, and an act of solidarity with others who spoke the same tongue but dropped 'aitches.

Plain speech was also the most economical way to communicate what was urgently true without pretense or evasion. Orwell's critique of political language and its abuses was not solely directed against the corruption of language coming from Berlin and Moscow; it also took aim at the more elegant evasions of English parliamentary rhetoric and political sloganeering. Most of us rail against oppressive institutions as a matter of instinct, but Orwell insisted, more persistently than any other writer of his time, that the language of institutions could be a deadly tool against liberty and happiness. In that sense *Homage to Catalonia*, *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are as much about language as they are about ideology. In his essay "Politics and the English Language" he writes that "the great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns, as it were instinctively, to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink." It is then, Orwell says in a memorable phrase, that a "mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like wet snow."

In a short piece ("Why I Write") Orwell stated that he wanted to turn political writing into an art form. To do that requires discipline, which means, in turn, constant writing.



Orwell did plenty of that. In the final years of his life he turned out columns, reviews, and pamphlets at an alarming rate. He had to since he was a free-lance journalist, one of a class he listed as among those teetering on the brink of irreversible penury. He had the gift of writing a book review, in a single draft, on the typewriter. Yet sheer bulk does not of itself create style in a writer — as reading anything by Isaac Asimov (apart from science fiction) demonstrates. Orwell wrote books, but he wrote only after he clearly observed (or, in some cases, after he experienced). It is from those close observations and experiences that he could then describe with that particular moral quality of his. It was the sight of a condemned prisoner avoiding a puddle as he walked to the gallows (in "The Hanging") that taught Orwell the essential humanity of the person and, as a consequence, made him an implacable foe of executions. "It is curious," he wrote, "but until that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man."

Orwell had witnessed that hanging while serving with the colonial police in Burma — the setting for his first novel *Burmese Days*. That moment at the hanging is so similar to his observations about the poor women we have already alluded to that it is almost a personal signature of the kind of writing he did. Another incident of the kind is in his *Homage to Catalonia*. Written after his participation in the Spanish Civil War, *Homage* is a book, as his biographer said, that was hated by the Right because the author was a socialist and hated by the Left because the author told the truth. While serving on the front lines Orwell saw a fascist soldier running away while clutching at his trousers, holding them up. He had the man clearly in his gunsight but did not fire: "I had come here to shoot at 'Fascists,' but a man who is holding up his trousers isn't a 'Fascist,' he is visibly a fellow creature."

Some years ago Robert Coles visited our campus to lecture. After the inevitable faculty reception I drove him back to his motel. We sat in the parking lot for a bit speaking about authors we both loved: Simone Weil, Flannery O'Connor, James Agee. He asked if I had ever read George Orwell. I replied that I had read *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (not much of an accomplishment; one does not get out of high school without reading at least one of those books). "Read the essays; read *Road to Wigan Pier*," he counseled. It was only this past year, after reading Bernard Crick's splendid (and definitive) *George Orwell: A Life*, that I took the doctor's advice and read through the entire four volumes of the essays.

I see now why Coles was so insistent. In the simplicity of Orwell's life, in his horror of cant, in his passion for human values, in his seriousness — in his *sincerity* — Orwell belongs to that select group of moral and political thinkers who gave grace to a dismal period of our history. Like Silone, Weil, Koestler, and Camus, he burned with a passion for justice, a love for humanity, and the deepest respect for the power of true language. It is one of the supreme paradoxes of our time that the adjective "Orwellian" should ring so sinister. With 1984 over, reading Orwell is still very much worthwhile for its bracing moral tone and its demand for that rarest of commodities: honest political language.

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Screen

SPUNKY PUNKS

TRADING PLACES IN AMERICA

Desperately Seeking Susan is slick but entertaining, a novel twist on the old screwball formula of "trading places." The basic plot is simple: a bored and boring New Jersey housewife named Roberta accidentally exchanges lives with a Lower East Side punk princess named Susan, thereby discovering far more fulfillment in love and life than with her hot-tub salesman husband. Roberta first becomes aware of her alter-ego's lifestyle by reading a personal ads column where a touring rock musician periodically contacts her with the headline, "Desperately Seeking Susan." After absorbing the ads at a local beauty parlor for months, Roberta finally decides to take action. She shows up at one of the odd couple assignations, accidentally gets clunked on the head, develops amnesia, and through certain mechanical plot devices, is forced to assume Susan's identity.

The screenplay is cute, despite the clunk and some other contrivances. But the whole wouldn't amount to much without the work of Rosanna Arquette as Roberta, the Madame Bovary of the 'burbs, and the punk rock singer Madonna as Susan, playing, in effect, a close resemblance to herself. Arquette has an odd mix of baby face and fully developed body that perfectly matches her embryonic character; in the early scenes, she has down pat the Fort Lee naif look and gait.

But Madonna steals the show. She's costumed in a weirdly illuminated jacket with a giant pyramid on the back ("one worn by Jim Hendrix," we're told); she trades it for some star-studded boots and parades through the rest of the film in a corset. With sure, wenchish aplomb, she translates to the screen her MTV persona: sassy, sardonic, seemingly content to pass life in sex, drugs, and men, and wagging her way successfully from one to the other. The truth and comedy derive from Madonna's half-wink that implies she's not half as bad as she pretends to be, but simply every little good girl's fantasy of being bad. If only teenagers took her with the high camp she insinuates. She probably can't do more than this movie, but she does herself immensely well. "Madonna," incidentally, isn't as blasphemous as it sounds; it's her actual middle name.

Desperately Seeking Susan is the second effort of director Susan Seidelman, whose *Smithereens* (1983) won an award for best first feature at Cannes. In the new film, as the title indicates, she has affectionately put some of her own fantasies, and brought to life a certain category of female escapism — the illusion that tough, biker lovers somehow provide more interesting male partners than bourgeois husbands. Seidelman's films focus entirely on women; the men, although convincing, are mostly foils. Even among the minor characters in the suburban set of *Desperately Seeking Susan,* Roberta's sister-in-law, not her husband, dominates, providing some of the best vapid lines in the screenplay. "How can you eat when your wife's disappeared?" she asks Roberta's spouse who says he's nervous. "Why can't you act like a normal person and take a Valium?"

Nevertheless, despite her sure grasp of feminine psychology, Seidelman misses a few beats. Her sociology is clichéd, a feminized version of Woody Allen's view of Manhattan and the Rest of the Cosmos. More importantly, she never penetrates Madonna's pose to make the finely ironic point that a punk-rock damsel might like life in Fort Lee. Seidelman provides a few scenes where Madonna languishes in tubs and pools, almost on the verge, one senses, of chucking all her downtrodden glitz. But the deeper humor of ironic inversion is never fully developed.

This is not because Seidelman can't see punk's dark side. She effectively captured it in *Smithereens*, the story of a girl from New Jersey with a perfervid dream of rock stardom and a fascination, to the point of self-destruction, with punk males. A cold, bitter satire, *Smithereens* made this new Bohemian low-life culture make sense even while it simultaneously made one sick. It told tough, tart truths — the kind on view in the current documentary *Streetwise*, about runaway teenagers living "on the lam" in Seattle.

The only serious thing about *Desperately Seeking Susan* is the old chestnut that tub salesmen make inadequate husbands, and on this I recommend Flaubert. The film may seek, but it doesn't delve into character. It shares the energy of *Smithereens* but lacks its satiric bite. One hopes that before Seidelman's apparently limited subject matter exhausts itself, she can regain her initial raw vision.

Lost in America is less slick, but in some ways more provocative. It's a yuppie drop-out film about seeking some meaning in life beyond gentrification. Writer and Director Albert Brooks plays a creative writer for an ad agency who fails to get an expected promotion. When Brooks reflects on the price he has paid in eight years of post-college conformity, he decides to revolt, dragging his wife (Julie Hagerty) away from her equivalent upscale job and comfortable Los Angeles lifestyle to "discover themselves in America." Southern Californians, like New Yorkers, apparently assume that they are no longer a part of it.

The farcical action of *Lost in America* is thin at times, but the sociology is interesting. Most of the plot involves a set of misadventures, based on Brooks's desire to relive *Easy Rider* ten years after. As Brooks explains himself, he has been too responsible in college and late adolescence; all he could think of then was jobs and millions. Nevertheless, even as he declares independence from his Ivan Illich SoCal culture, he wants a protected version of dropping out — i.e., taking along a cash "nest egg" built on trading in stock options. With demonic glee, Brooks, in effect, plays the old yippie Jerry Rubin, now stockbroker Jerry Rubin. It may be the ultimate American dream: to have your cocaine and eat it too.

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Hagerty — the tall, thin, and wacky stewardess of *Airplane* — complements Brooks's manic chatter with her own sweet silliness; their marriage proves true Dr. Johnson's adage on odd couples, "his nonsense suited her nonsense." Hagerty gets a light year of comic mileage from a wide-eyed routine when she gambles away the "nest egg" one night in Las Vegas and magnifies her stare to resemble that of a rambunctious kitten's. Her disaster leads to an attempt to find work in the "real world" of Arizona, with Brooks winding up as a crossing guard and Hagerty as the assistant manager of a fast-food hot dog stand. Part of the film's charm is the casual way it develops the ironies of their situation. Matter-of-factly, Hagerty accepts the notion that her boss, a peach-fuzzed teenager, has to take a night to "sleep on" hiring her.

Some of the scenes in *Lost in America* are too casually constructed and fall flat. But others include marvelous material, like Brooks's attempt to persuade a casino owner to return Hagerty's losses, although this is not well-integrated into the main line of the story. In addition, the all-too-frequent references to *Easy Rider* and other films have an inside air; the preludium to the film, a Larry King-Rex Reed radio discussion of comedy, provides an awkward, almost academic, declaration of intention.

But the key problem with *Lost in America* is its evasion of the social questions it so ironically, if farcically, raises. Because of the "nest egg" disaster, Brooks and Hagerty never get a chance to pursue their fantasy. If they had, one wonders, what would have been the result? And when they return to yuppiedom, what impact will their adventure have on their future life? Will they be back to the zombie-like pursuit of bigger and better? Most importantly, will they be able to integrate freedom and responsibility? Whatever its defects as a story, at least *The Big Chill* tried to answer the latter question; *Lost in America*, too true to its tone perhaps, runs away from it. It plays with the issue of clashing values, but even a comedy should play for bigger stakes.

TOM O'BRIEN

THE MANY CLOAKS OF DISCLOSURE

Confessing our selves

ROBERT JONES

In his admirable new book, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, $24.95, 238 pp.), Richard Kieckhefer tells us that Peter of Luxembourg would stay at his desk throughout the night jotting lists of his sins on scraps of paper and collect them in a pocket book so they could be near him always. But the unfolding of his soul induced an outpouring of recrimination and sin; the more Peter confessed, the more he found to confess. He began to forsake sleep entirely in favor of these written confessions. Eventually his spiritual advisors forbade him to write at all and appointed two priests to hear his sins at intervals during the day. All night Peter banged on their door in a frenzy of penitence, so that finally they locked him out. Clearly undaunted by his confessors' reluctance to hear him, Peter returned to writing. After his death at eighteen, in his room was found a chest overflowing with slips of paper, each one detailing a litany of his sins.

The event of guilt and its power over conscience is the mystery central to human consciousness. In its emphasis on the revelation of sin and the unburdening of desire, hagiography prefigures the contemporary obsession with autobiography and biography. The urgency to confront the world publicly is as much a characteristic of the fourteenth century as of the twentieth. But Peter of Luxembourg's compulsion to document his blotted soul aims at the dissolution of normal self-centered consciousness, not at self-expression. He seeks to empty his body of the world for the glory of the divine. Utterance becomes literally destructive of the ego. Peter's slips of paper, Henry Suso's *Life of the Servant*, Teresa of Avila's mystical writings, do not give voice to a self as we have come to define it, but to a soul aspiring to nonbeing. In confession, one speaks oneself out of conventional existence and into another world.

But as the psyche has replaced the spirit as the perceived core of human personality, confession has been transfigured like a mutated gene; we have had to adapt ourselves differently to experience. In the autobiographies of the secular world, confession no longer manifests the boundless desire for salvation, but becomes the declaration of a self onto the world. If hagiography is the history of self-education, autobiography is the narrative of self-glory.

Think of the distances separating Augustine's *Confessions* from Rousseau's. There is more than the distinctiveness of two intelligences, one humbled and anxious before God, the other wreaking vengeance on his persecutors. Both seek redemption through speaking, but for Augustine, as Peter Brown tell us, "confessio" simultaneously means to accuse oneself of the past and to praise God as one's future. This double urgency of the backward glance perpetually unmasking the future is always present in Augustine's writing. In book 10 of *The Confessions*, he writes of the self revealed through memory. "This memory of mine is a great force, a vertiginous mystery, my God, a hidden depth of infinite complexity: and this is my soul, and this is what I am. What, then, am I, my God?"

ROBERT JONES *works for a major publisher in New York City.*

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Confession reveals the infinite mystery of personality rendered in memory. And in the act of remembrance, in turn, we glimpse whatever we can know of God in this life. Confession inexorably links the human soul to God.

One need not be a believer to understand the radicalness of a soul revealing itself to a god trusted to be the order of truth in the universe. One cannot find refuge in one's heart or conceal oneself in history because deceit will always be known. Deception is of the self, never of God. Existence is treacherous, the heart is always anxious, because what is revealed to the self in confession is only a fragment known fully to God. To speak what is in one's heart simply acknowledges what is already known to God. To see confession in this light reveals the inadequacies of psychoanlytic understandings of penitence as masochistic products of a servile will. Peter of Luxembourg and Augustine have no illusions about the limitations of human knowledge. In giving voice to the incompleteness of the human soul, they find its power.

What strikes one most about Augustine is his guilelessness. *The Confessions* has the clarity of truth because it never occurs to Augustine that his past is not already known to God. Rousseau may not be the first, but he is certainly the best, example of the transformation in our idea of what it means to tell the truth. If Augustine speaks to relinquish himself of the past, Rousseau writes to claim the past as his own. In his *Confessions*, he recognizes that one can justify any behavior or validate any emotion if it comes under the cloak of disclosure. *This is how I felt; this is how it was* become statements that stamp one's life indelibly onto history. Rousseau wins against his persecutors not because what he says is true, but because his version is the one that prevails. With history as arbiter and judge, in Rousseau we see the conviction that truth can be manufactured through the art of retelling so that the personal version becomes the final chapter. If one looks to the past for the model of modern autobiographies, or even for models of the writing of history, one looks to Rousseau.

Augustine is never his own subject; he writes of himself only insofar as his life exemplifies and articulates the human spirit striving for grace. In Rousseau's *Confessions*, personality becomes triumphant. Through the act of allegedly laying bare his conscience and by a selective, calculated memory, Rousseau creates himself for posterity. Truth as Augustine understood it is neither possible nor relevant. In the worlds between their *Confessions*, we see the awesome significance of a civilization in which myths of human progress, rather than religious myths, reign supreme. Confession is no longer a preparatory move in an ongoing dialogue with God, but an end-unto-itself. One speaks to regain a lost connection and strives to turn the ear of culture into an authenticating presence. All efforts to speak involve the creation of a self. We are made by writing. Confessing becomes self-mythologizing, the act of creating a persona which can become part of the historical memory.

AFTER Rousseau, narratives of personal history mingle with the territory of art. And as we leave Rousseau and enter the Romantic age, the cult of personality governs life and becomes the organizing principle of a diminishing world. If art exists as the redemptive force in experience, as it does in Romantic poetry, then the artist becomes quasi-saint, and it is to the life of the artist the culture turns to find examples of the life fully lived. The artist becomes our most dramatic fiction. And the act of writing itself assumes the mystical significance of the oracle speaking to reveal the truth of inner consciousness, which is the truth of the world. The operatic intensity of the lives of Byron and Keats, the artistic suicide of Rimbaud, retain their power because they proclaim the self as the supreme fiction. "I am the eye of the universe." The entire process of evolution is subsumed into the artist's personality, so that it is impossible to distinguish the life from the work, or the self from the world. The transformative power of the imagination, the voices of desire spoken through memory, take the poet beyond personality to an ideal self, one that is at once timeless, yet apprehended in time. Romanticism is the last refuge of hopefulness, of the belief that there is redemptive power in the invocation of individual desires onto the world. To utter *"I am"* is the creative act. In this view, it is this moment of constitution, infinitely retrieved in memory, that is salvific in the fullest sense.

One can respect the beauty of that intention while recognizing its futility. As the impulse of romanticism dies out, one has the image of a body flinging itself against a wall. The poet speaking his or her life into the world affects no change; their poems become hymns sung into the darkness. Fevers and hallucinations usurp the purity of sensation. Hence, Theophile Gautier's proclamation of decadence as "the confession of dying passion entering depravity." A romanticism of the nerves replaces the romanticism of the imagination. Art for art's sake, feeling for feeling's sake, are an admission of failure. The self implodes: its energy finds no outlet in the world, so it turns upon itself.

In the vague complacency of our age, it is nearly impossible to speak the language of disintegration and decay without engaging a cliché. So we forget how strongly the urge to redeem the present, how strongly the belief in the restorative power of art, were to the nineteenth century. And even as *fin de siècle* disenchantment passed to twentieth-century bewilderment, the most influential writers clung to a lingering romantic hope for the possibilities inherent in self-expression. If the individual has been forsaken by society and reduced to a voyeur of its own existence, then there is still a belief in art's redemptive power for the isolated self. Reverie no longer reveals the vast, transformative event of remembrance, but comes as an interruption: for a "moment" in Woolf; in an "epiphany" in Joyce; as a "shock" in Walter Benjamin. The past still counts for something. The self remains the subject because only in the self do we experience the jolt of memory. But it is never the personal self for its own sake, but always the ideal self expressed through language.

Can it be a coincidence that the great, modernist writers left no autobiog-

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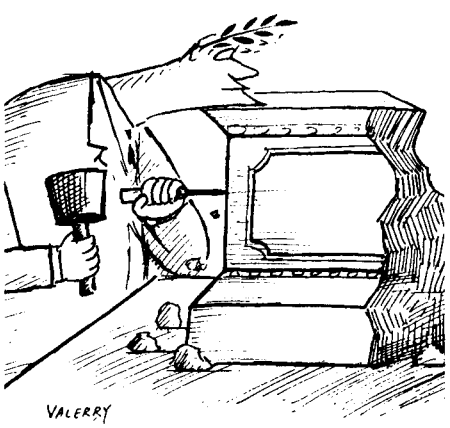
raphies? For modernism the individual life is part of the jabbering masses. Virginia Woolf wrote of Proust that he brought "the light of an immensely civilized and saturated intelligence to bear upon chaos." This is the territory of art at its most self-conscious, not autobiography. The origin of most autobiography is reminiscence; of art, remembrance. What unites *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* and Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* (Putnam/Perigee, $7.95 paper, 316 pp.) as the modern classics of their genre is the transformation of the present through memory. Proust recreates the past under the guise of fiction, Nabokov under the guise of fact, but these are only labels in an act of writing that has identical significance. The author is the subject only insofar as he reveals the catastrophic experience of loss. But it is never simply personal loss and never the banality of the individual as a microcosm of the whole.

Nabokov's autobiography opens with the haunting image of the family photograph predating his birth in which his absence is its strongest aspect. To come to consciousness is to realize the irrelevance of the self in history: "common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness." Speak, memory: it is only in recourse to remembrance that we recover our banishment from the past. As romanticism dies in the language of the great modernists, it is the memory of suffering by which we subvert the historical present. But even this impulse towards retrieval is ultimately lost. The transitional work for our age is neither *Finnegans Wake* nor *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* because they continue to reclaim the self's integrity through the memory of the return. This illusion of self-preservation vanishes with Woolf's *The Waves*. Bernard's final question, "how, then, to describe the world seen without a self?" addresses a void in which memory is submerged by the present. Perception breaks off from desire and drags the self after it in the "rushing stream of broken dreams." The self is drowned in the attempt to name itself against the current. In *The Waves*, Woolf remains linked to past tradition only by the regret in Bernard's voice of despair, by his memory of all that it is no longer possible to regain.

IN the literature of the post-modern age, Bernard finds his descendant in the heroic anti-self of Sylvia Plath. If the world has become a void, then the poet seizes the void as her own. Most readers want to find the consolation of the personal in Plath's poetry, but her impulse is to rid consciousness of personality. The poet deconstructs through language. Confession, the utterance of the "I," sheds experience like dead cells. The poetry's terror is its voicelessness: the only power left the self is to create metaphors of silence that give a name to an encroaching absence. This is the last,



possible moment of transcendence. If *"I am"* was once the transformative, creative expression that brought the world into harmony with inner consciousness, the emptied self now addresses the void and says, *"I am not."* This declaration of non-being is the final, authenticating act of will. In the waning violence of individuality, all that remains is the artist's neurotic arrogance: the desire to collapse the world into the emptiness that is the self, and by its annihilation, lay claim to it.

Plath's poetry leaves us with the image of a black hole echoing with the static of a once human voice. Language bereft of desire becomes "words, dry and riderless," flung to their own signification. Language replaces the self as the subject of discourse. For what is the title of Sartre's autobiography but *The Words*, and what is its most powerful image but that of the man transfixed before the mirror as he watches himself in the act of speech?

This movement toward language for its own sake can be seen as a resting place from the anxiety of nihilism. That most pleasurable of post-modernist writers, Roland Barthes, led us before his death to the image of a self rescued from the discords of history and the ego by the serene emptiness of language.

In his autobiography, *Roland Barthes By Roland Barthes* (Hill & Wang, $7.25 paper, 188 pp.), he returns to the memory of a streetcar in Biarritz. For a moment we think his contemplation of the now vanished car will reveal something about the present. Think what elegies Proust might have written for the missing streetcar — or those Tennessee Williams wrote. But today, Barthes tells us, we cannot "apply a mythic embellishment to the past, or . . . express regrets for a lost youth by pretending to regret a streetcar. This is to say that the art of living has no history: it does not evolve: the pleasure which vanishes vanishes for good, there is no substitute for it. Other pleasures come, which replace nothing. No progress in pleasure, nothing but mutations."

Barthes's axiom is that we can only deliver ourselves from slavishness to the past by the act of writing. Self-expression, the impulse toward autobiography, does not give voice to the desire to be, but is the medium by which we absolve the self of personality and its monopoly of meaning. To become conscious is to unmask the fiction of the "I," and recognize the subject to which we always address ourselves in speaking: the omnipotence of language.

We have, in a sense, come full circle. The question remains, of course, as to whether this enthronement of language is not itself an "illusion," an inversion of the identical, human instinct for God. And that even in the unmasking of fictions, we create them. It may be that the genesis of human experience is to express the flight from ourselves and that this desire finds its beginning eternally in the word.

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Books: A LANGUAGE FOR COMPASSION

MEN AND ANGELS

Mary Gordon
Random House, $16.95, 242 pp.

Robert Phillips

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal,'' the familiar source (I Corinthians 13:1) for the title of Mary Gordon's third novel clearly states this book's theme: Anne Foster, an academic wife and sometime art historian, lacks the capacity to love Laura Post, her incessantly smiling, drab mother's-helper. If this doesn't sound like material for a gripping novel, you are in for a surprise. Its first three-quarters is an intense and moving meditation on the nature and practice of motherhood, human love, and selfless devotion. The book also is concerned with feminist themes, and the consolations of art and religion. One question Gordon explores in depth is whether or not art and family are mutually exclusive: to write her book,, Anne Foster separates herself from her husband and hires someone to tend her children. The subject of her monograph — a fictitious American painter named Caroline Watson — abandoned her own two-year-old son to take up the artist's life. Anne and Caroline's lives are counterpointed throughout.

The novel is presented from alternating points of view, first Anne's, then Laura's, with chunks of Caroline's letters and journals included as well. As Gordon shifts point-of-view, she also changes sentence structure and rhythm. We soon see Anne as highly introspective (though perhaps not as intelligent as we are told she is), Laura as obsessively religious and determined to ''save'' Anne. The chapters on Anne are much longer than those on Laura, as if Gordon could not sustain the fierce self-hatred of Laura for long. The author clearly is more comfortable writing about Anne.

Men and Angels is written in dense, poetic prose. Anne's comfortable life is described as ''ornamented with good fortune, like a spray of diamonds on the dark hair of a woman''; her son's hair ''smelled acrid, overripe, like stored grain''; and a priest ''wore his unhappiness like a suit passed down from an older brother.'' There are heart-breaking scenes, especially when Anne's young daughter is laughed at in the school play; when Laura ludicrously wears her new hiking boots with her new dressy dress, thinking she will please Anne (who had given her both for distinctly disparate occasions); and when Anne rescues her children from falling through thin ice.

That ice which barely supports them is a metaphor for the precarious relationship between parent and child. As Gordon states late in the book, ''. . . there was so little you could do for them, even if you spent every moment with them, gave them every waking thought, there wasn't much that you could do.'' At one point in the novel it occurs to Anne that ''one couldn't simply say someone was a good parent: one had to be a good parent to *someone*. So her father had been a

(Continued on page 312)

HABITS OF THE HEART

INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMITMENT IN AMERICAN LIFE

Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton

California, $16.95, 355 pp.

Jack Beatty

HABITS OF THE HEART is an extended gloss on this sentence from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*: ''Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of his family and friends; with this little society formed to his tastes, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself.'' Tocqueville thought that this retreat into personal life would tend to impoverish public life; after spending five years researching the subject, the five authors of *Habits of the Heart* conclude that it impoverishes private life as well.

Americans have a hard time recognizing that communal activity can be good for them — or at least the 200 white middle-class men and women and authors interviewed do — chiefly because the language they use and the culture it grows out of are not suited for the job. Americans need, the authors say, ''to find a moral language that will transcend their radical individualism.'' And if we don't? ''Livy's words about ancient Rome also apply to us: 'We have reached the point where we cannot bear either our vices or their cure.' '' Yet a cure must be found for ''the time may be approaching when we will either reform our republic or fall into the hands of despotism, as many republics have done before us.''

That ominous warning is tacked on at the end of this long work; it does not flow from what the social scientists are pleased to call ''the data'' — the voices of the dozen or so of their interviewees to whom the authors give speaking parts. These people sound sensible enough:

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some of them are even politically sentient. True, others are therapists and most subscribe to the therapeutic mode of looking at the world. But are they really the kind of people who would keep nattering on about their sex lives while "an administrative despotism was installed in the U.S.?" I don't know, but without giving adequate grounds for their fear, the authors seem to think so. This disjuncture between their evidence and the admonitions they project from it reveals the hybrid character of *Habits*.

On the one hand it is a work of sociological analysis based on interviews and written, it seems, by half the social scientists on the two seaboards. On the other, it is "a detailed reading of, and commentary on, Tocqueville," to quote the authors, which relies heavily on Tocqueville's interpretations of America and his dark prophecies as to its possible futures. Where Tocqueville consulted the evidence of what he saw and felt and feared, the authors consult Tocqueville. They cite him as if he were an ontologist of American democracy, not the time-bound, though hardly time-limited, observer he was. If you treated Marx or Freud with this degree of deference you'd be accused of an intellectual slavishness bordering on surrender. If Tocqueville himself had taken this attitude toward any great predecessor we should not have had his great book. Authority is what genius creates, not what it depends on.

The authors picture the modern American self as desperately needing a language of connection — and have, it seems to me, an original and trenchant point here. Thus Brian Palmer, one of the interviewees, is a happily married man with a strong commitment to his family, yet he cannot find any moral ground beyond his momentary desires to "explain what seem to be the real commitments that define his life, and to that extent the commitments themselves are precarious." Thus another of the authors' subjects told them how close, over a long marriage, he had grown to his wife, but his "utilitarian individualist language kept pulling him back" every time he tried to express the notion that this shared history constituted a bond stronger than any possible calculation of costs and benefits, pains and pleasures. Unlike the evangelical Christians the authors interviewed, he was unable to use words like "sacrifice," "obligation," and "self-denial" even though he had lived them out many times in his marriage.

So too Wayne Bauer, a California political activist dedicated to "empowering" the poor, cannot answer the normative question: What would a just society look like? For in order to do so, "Wayne would have to do more than think about the fair procedures that should be created to give individuals the ability to exercise power over their own lives. He would need some sense of the substantive goals, some way to think about distributive justice. But here his cultural resources fail him, as they do most of us." Our therapeutic culture makes us afraid to take moral positions: people might accuse us of intolerance, the sin of sins in a radically individualistic order.

By contrast, the subjects who felt themselves to be part of the history of a people or a community, rooted in tradition and time, expressed a richer personal selfhood. The authors call these ties that bind "communities of memory" and make this fine observation about them: "The communities of memory that tie us to the past also turn us toward the future as communities of hope. They carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspirations for ourselves and those closest to us with aspirations of a larger whole and see our own efforts as being, in part, contributions to a common good."

The authors end with a chapter entitled "Transforming American Culture" in which they call for a renewal of the "social ecology," an idea they adapt from Stephen Toulmin. They proceed to recommend a list of reforms to that end. These include changing the nature of compensation so as to "reduce the punishments of failure and the rewards of success." This would help to restore a sense of "calling" to work: an element of the biblical tradition now forgotten. No doubt this is a good idea. (It certainly is a borrowed one: this time from Christopher Jencks.) But, like the other proposals they throw out, it hardly seems immanent in our historical moment. It is an idea imposed by their wills, not discerned in the current of history by their five-headed intelligence. This is disappointing. Idealism is a fine thing, but unless it engages necessity it can be as morally vacuous as the language of the most lonely individualist.

But I must not end on such a dismissive note. The authors write well and sometimes eloquently. They take serious matters seriously. Rare and admirable for scholars, they put their ethical cards on the table. Above all, they manage to criticize the ideas of their interviewees without condescending either to the ideas or to the people. In its own special way this critical respect for their subjects is a communal gesture as moving as any recorded in *Habits of the Heart*.

Pater et magister

POPE JOHN XXIII
SHEPHERD OF THE
MODERN WORLD
Peter Hebblethwaite
Doubleday, $19.95, 550 pp.

John Deedy

POPES, like kings of yore, live on largely in the continuity of the tradition which gave them rise. The king is dead, long live the king; the pope is dead, long live the pope. Except with Pope John XXIII, né Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli, it is different. More than any pope of the past, except Peter, I suppose, John XXIII is with our times in a real, almost tangible way. There is first the memory of "good Pope John," and there is then the fact of the "new Pentecost," which he delivered, as promised, through "his" council. If some popes have a life beyond the crypt of St. Peter's and the Vatican Archives, John XXIII is first among them.

Peter Hebblethwaite's biographical purpose, accordingly, is not to breathe life into an artifact of papal history. John XXIII has been dead since 1963, but he is

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no artifact. He is a man who merits careful attention as one with a continuing influence. In this respect Hebblethwaite serves his subject well — certainly as well as can be expected considering that many official records are still under lock and key, and that an inevitable reticence no doubt inhibits some surviving supporting players in the drama of the Johannine years. Thus, a "definitive biography" Hebblethwaite's book is not, dustjacket claim notwithstanding. But it is the best John XXIII book to date, which is praise indeed.

Hebblethwaite, the ex-Jesuit, British journalist, is admiring, but he is not hagiographic. In fact, his book points up so many paradoxes in the Roncalli/John XXIII story that we are left to wonder that so mortal a man could have had such an immortal effect on history. For instance, Roncalli the bureaucrat was no visionary. The Ethiopian War was not a moral outrage, but a time for prayer that the "big fish" would quickly swallow the "little fish" so we could get on with peace again. Similarly, the ascendancy

Religious booknotes

Conscience, creativity, & controversy

Mary Gerhart

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN was fond of saying that, with respect to past theological controversies, one must rethink and decide for oneself which side one would have taken had one been involved. We might well turn around this advice and say the same for future controversies. The following books on politics and religion offer occasions to rethink the positions which are likely to be reflected in the agenda of the upcoming synod called by John Paul II for this autumn.

For many, the issues of human rights and freedom within the church are implicit in any other concern. One of the most thoughtful contributions to these issues is *Authority in the Church and the Schillebeeckx Case*, edited by Leonard Swidler and Piet F. Fransen. The title may unintentionally mislead the reader into expecting that the entire book addresses the "Schillebeeckx case" whereas only one article, the last, is an explicit analysis of that controversy. The other articles, papers originally from the International Colloquium on Authority in the Church held in 1981, address broad topics such as authority and ministry, the sociology of knowledge and authority, *consensus fidelium* and *demo-kratia*, and human rights in the church. The topic of women and ordination, although not central, appears occasionally and is itself helpfully contextualized as an example (albeit by all male contributors). The topic of ideology receives one of its best treatments in the articles by Edward Schillebeeckx and Franz-Xavier Kaufmann.

Authority in the Church and the Schillebeeckx Case, edited by Leonard Swidler and Piet Fransen, Crossroad/Continuum, $9.95 paper, 267 pp.

MARY GERHART *is professor of religious studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. Her most recent book is* Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding, *co-authored with Allan Russell (Texas Christian University).*

Peter Hinchliff's *Holiness and Politics* doesn't break new ground but does provide a valuable self-critical analysis on "conditioning" in both the political and religious senses. This book is a revision of essays given as the Bampton Lectures at Oxford in 1982. The author spent most of his life in South Africa and draws many of his examples from there. He parts company with theologies of liberation when they demand action in the absence of moral considerations. Hinchliff is to be commended for his attempt to mediate the widely divergent positions on current political crises, including that of nuclear warfare, as well as those in particular countries. The book will challenge both conservative and liberal consciences and could provoke more self-critical synod debate.

Holiness and Politics, by Peter Hinchliff, Eerdmans, $7.95, paper, 213 pp.

Robert Booth Fowler demonstrates that unpredictable changes can happen in a short time. He documents one decade of significant change in evangelical Christianity in his historical study, *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought 1966-1976*. What he finds is that "as evangelicalism . . . came more and more often into contact with the broader culture, the . . . old consensus on conservative values in all aspects of life gave way to a spreading social and political diversity." The book weaves this diversity into a complex but easily readable history. Both feminism and resistance to women's liberation, for example, are featured in his accounts of representative events. The same issue resurfaces in another chapter, "The New Man and the New Woman." Fowler distinguishes between evangelicals and fundamentalists and tries to assess the lasting effects of the growth of "evangelicalism" since 1976. His conclusion — that "the further rise of pluralism" is likely to be welcomed by many reflective evangelicals and

A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976, by Robert Booth Fowler, Eerdmans, $13.95, paper, 298 pp.

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of the Fascists may not have been a moment for the beating of drums, but the Fascists could be given the benefit of whatever doubt that was going. Germany's rearmament policy — well, how about casting it in the context of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins? Roncalli did. Small wonder that his superior in the Secretariat of State, Monsignor Domenico Tardini, would once exclaim, "This fellow has understood nothing." Roncalli for years seemed to float above controversies, abstain from moral judgments, and give credence to the wrong people — like Franz von Papen, who in Turkey represented the "smiling, Catholic face of Hitler's Germany."

Early naiveties, yes. But there is no effort on Hebblethwaite's part to implicate Roncalli in the "silences" of Pius XII or the ongoing pragmatics of the Vatican's Cardinal Maglione with respect to Jewish refugees — although, he notes, there is a "disconcerting" 1943 Roncalli communication worrying that Vatican aid to a particular convoy of Jews to Palestine "looks like the reconstruction

seen as "bleak tragedy" by others — will be recognized as being true within Catholicism as well.

Christopher Mooney's *Inequality and the American Conscience: Justice through the Judicial System* is a sophisticated treatment of the American ideal of fairness and equality — an ideal which, Mooney maintains, is rooted in a powerful religious conviction. Mooney reviews the *Bakke* case (which denied the legality of quotas in affirmative action programs) and subsequent developments (up to the appointment of Clarence Pendleton as the new Chair of the Commission on Civil Rights) under the Reagan administration. The theological perspective in this book is muted but persuasive. Mooney understands laws to be questions and generators of further ques-

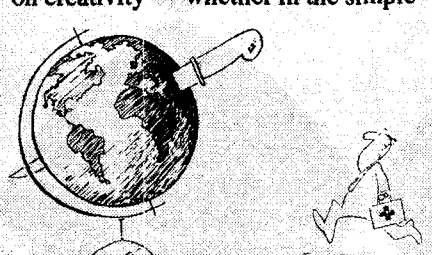
***Inequality and the American Conscience*, by Christopher F., Mooney, Paulist, $5.95, paper, 136 pp.**

tions: "law exists in the dialogue between the power to question and the power to persuade." He regards the Supreme Court as having a special voice in that dialogue, a voice capable of calling people as a nation to an examination of conscience. Despite the lack of unanimity among the judges (there were six opinions and two majorities), the *Bakke* case was, for Mooney, an example of judicial statesmanship that resolved, perhaps in the best way possible for that time, fiercely conflicting claims and competing values. In this sense, the case is a "way station" in the history of one nation's growing consciousness of historical inequities — a consciousness which can suffer relapse as well as development. Mooney's interpretative principle is unequivocal: we interpret history by our present-day experience. What we become as a nation is determined not by the past, but rather by the "present and past . . . interacting in a single dialectical process." The process Mooney lays out

***Conscientization and Creativity: Paulo Freire and Christian Education*, by Daniel S. Schipani, University Press of America, $23.50 cloth, $11.25 paper, 244 pp.**

serves as an analogy for what can and should happen in the synod.

Although Daniel Schipani's *Conscientization and Creativity* is a faithful presentation of Paulo Freire's work, it is also critical and creative. The author is a professor of psychology, counseling, and education at Seminario Evangelico de Puerto Rico and wrote this book originally as a dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary. American readers will appreciate the relationship Schipani draws between Freire and other theorists (such as Rollo May, Bernard Lonergan, Arthur Koestler, Stephen Crites, Jean Piaget, and liberation theologians). But the best contribution of the book is to be found in its focus on creativity — whether in the simple



exercise of learning phonemes or in the practice of cultural revolution understood as "reconstructionism." Schipani distinguishes between the "early" and the "later" Freire and suggests that Freire's own use of Marxist categories is not intrinsic to an appropriation of his method.

In the last analysis, what the synod needs most urgently are men and women who are *Justice Seekers, Peace Makers*, to use the title of Michael True's collection of thirty-two "portraits" in courage. These brief (5-6 page) accounts of some well known public figures (for example, Hannah Arendt, Daniel and Phil Berrigan, Dorothy Day, Eugene Debs) and others less widely known (the first portrait is of John Leary, a peace activist who died in 1982 at age twenty-four), are best characterized as contemporary hagiography. But where ancient "lives of saints" frequently reveled in the bizarre and bordered on the incredible, these lives need no demythologizing. They appear at once individual and appropriable. Ending with Lucy Stone, Leo

***Justice Seekers, Peace Makers: 32 Portraits in Courage*, by Michael True, Twenty-third Publications, $5.95, paper, 160 pp.**

Tolstoy, John Henry Newman, and Thomas Paine, the book is drawn with a deft hand.

In a few years the synod will be past history. But progress on the issues — through work occasioned by, even if not directly related to, the synod — may be just as decisive in the long run.

MARY GERHART

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of the Hebrew Kingdom, and so raises certain doubts in my mind." Roncalli's practice was better than his theology, Hebblethwaite remarks in noting that Roncalli provided food, clothing, and transit visas to 24,000 Slovakian Jews en route to Palestine.

With respect to Roncalli and the Jews, Hebblethwaite destroys one myth and overlooks one important action.

The myth destroyed was that as a Vatican diplomat in Turkey Roncalli issued "baptismal certificates" to Jews seeking safe haven. The fact is that he forwarded to Vatican diplomats in Hungary and Bulgaria "immigration certificates" issued by the Palestine Jewish Agency. Hebblethwaite traces the inaccuracy to Ira Hirshman's 1962 book *Caution to the Winds*.

The credit omitted was John's editing in 1959 of the Good Friday prayer of the church for the Jews. Ordered dropped were references which spoke of the Jews as "perfidious." Not acceptable either were paralogisms like "faithless" or "unbelieving." There would be no substitution for the excised *perfidis* and *perfidiam*. (If memory serves correctly, Pope John himself interrupted the Good Friday liturgy that year and had the prayer repeated in the new form, after the priest-leader had gone on using the old slurs.)

In France, Roncalli is portrayed as a nuncio pinned between a rock and a hard stone: the rock, an intransigent Rome; the hard stone, an adult church solid in its convictions. It was the period of the incipient Worker Priest Movement. It was the time of remarkable priests like Suhard, Congar, Chenu, de Lubac, Teilhard, Rondet, Bouillard and others who would be the targets, oblique or otherwise, of *Humani Generis*. Roncalli was the Vatican's second-choice for Paris (the nuncio to Argentina had declined on health grounds), and the inference is that he conducted himself much as a second-choice might. He took no part in France's exciting intellectual life, and in general administered in such fashion as to give rise to what the Jesuit Robert Rouquette termed "the Roncalli mystery": How was it that a man who appeared so conventional and conservative in France could turn out to be a pope who would astonish the world as the originator of a precedent-shattering council and author of two landmark encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris?*

The "mystery" began to clarify during the "mission to Venice," where as patriarch Roncalli lowered high ideological temperatures related to the legacy of Mussolini and the "threat" of Communism; where his theology took on a bolder coloration (there was discreet opposition to a new Marian feast, set in place anyway as the Queenship of Mary); where he began to reach out more directly in attempts to close the gap between Christian and secular culture, the church and "men of good will." Enigmas remained, to be sure. The opening to the left smacked of doctrinal error and breach of Catholic discipline. Furthermore, the ecumenical vision was still framed in the context of the offensive word "return" to the one, true fold of those who had strayed.

Nor were enigmas to vanish entirely once Roncalli became pope (which, Hebblethwaite argues, came as no bolt out of the blue to an allegedly reluctant *papabile*; Roncalli may not have campaigned for the job, but he did take "some initiatives"). There was the unimpressive Roman Synod of 1960 and the "unexpected bombshell" *Veterum Sapientia* reimposing Latin for the teaching of philosophy and theology in seminaries. The difference now is that Hebblethwaite is able to fit ambiguities into a schema. The synod was a dry run for the council; *Veterum Sapientia* was part of a "balancing act" to placate Curia conservatives worried for their immutable world. (Not enigmatic, but decidedly underappreciated by Kennedy biographers and the American media in general, says Hebblethwaite, was John's strategic role in helping resolve the Cuban missile crisis.)

The full story of Pope John's council must await the next century (as Hebblethwaite notes, the Vatican Archives have a 75-year reserve rule), but it is clear that the council was neither sudden inspiration nor accident of John's pontificate. For some time John talked about the possibility of a council to trusted friends, and it is likely that both Cardinals Ruffini and Ottaviani put the idea to him early-on in his pontificate, as each subsequently claimed. Ruffini and Ottaviani had set forth reasons for a council to Pius XII in 1948, only to have him decide he could do the work of a council better and more economically. (*Ergo,* the dogmatic definition of the Assumption and the issuance of *Humani Generis*.) John fostered the idea that "his" council was of sudden inspiration, but Hebblethwaite's contention is that memory had played tricks on him.

Whatever, the Council became coterminous with John's pontificate as a whole, and acted as his pontificate's goal, policy, program, content. Hebblethwaite is happy about this, and so might be the rest of us. John XXIII was right for the times, and Peter Hebblethwaite's book is right for John XXIII, even if it isn't the last word.

Mary Gordon's 'Men & Angels'

(Continued from page 308)

wonderful father to her, but with Beth he had always bungled. . . ."

Gordon creates a convincing gallery of minor characters — Laura's parents, Anne's parents and sister, Ed Corcoran and his wife, Ben and Jane. But the novel does have its faults. Gordon drives home her messages too often. The one-to-one equation of Caroline's unloved son and the unloved Laura is too transparent. The novel's climax is anticlimactic, with an Epilogue that is unnecessary. Further, Gordon could use a touch of humor to relieve the unrelenting claustrophobia and domesticity. But she has produced a touching novel on original and important themes. It is apparent that Mary Gordon is not just another talented young American novelist. She has much to say, and will become one of the voices of her generation.

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The savage mission

BLACK ROBE

Brian Moore
Dutton, $15.95, 241 pp.

John R. Breslin

SHORTLY AFTER finishing Brian Moore's latest novel, I began rereading, for a course I teach in international fiction, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, his first and most famous novel about the arrival of British colonialism in Nigeria and the subsequent breakdown of the native culture. A week or so later arrived for review a collection of newly translated stories by Shusaku Endo, a Japanese novelist who has written movingly, especially in *Silence*, about the fortunes — mainly misfortunes — of early Christian missionaries to his country.

What the Irishman, the Nigerian, and the Japanese all have in common, in addition to being talented and successful contemporary novelists is a fascination with that particular kind of conflict that arises when two cultures with little understanding of one another come into sharp and often fatal contact. More specifically, they see the nub of that conflict as essentially religious.

It is thus no accident that all the novels are historical, set in a time when religion maintained its public and unquestioned character and when, for the Christian missionaries, the salvation of souls took precedence over every other consideration, including their own physical well-being and that of the people they came to evangelize. In our relativized, secularized culture, it takes a considerable act of imagination to conjure up a world in which the absolutes of faith compelled universal and unquestioning assent, if not always consonant action. What these novelists have discovered, of course, is that such a world view invests human life with an extraordinary drama, for an eternal choice of heaven or hell can turn on the most private thought or action.

It is precisely here that Brian Moore begins. What intrigued him about the French missionaries to Canada was the story of one Jesuit who, in the face of his utter revulsion before the realities of life among the Hurons, "bound himself," in the historian Parkman's words, "by a solemn vow to remain in Canada to the day of his death." What would lead someone to make such a vow, and what might be its consequences? These questions sent Moore hunting through historical records and anthropological research to try to understand how "Black Robe" and "Savage" (their names for one another) became mired in a mutual misunderstanding that caused the failure of the Jesuit mission and the eventual conquest of the Hurons by their enemies the Iroquois.

But even deeper for the novelist than the truth of history is the truth of fiction; it is the solemn vow, the effort to cling to an absolute of conscience in the face of

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intolerable physical pain, spiritual despair, and failure that unites Moore's Father Paul Laforgue with Endo's Father Sebastian Rodrigues. But paradoxically Moore, unlike Endo, attempts to present sympathetically the world view of the people the missionaries have come to convert. For all their foul language and cruelty, the Indians in the novel possess a dignity and a generosity that go far to justify their feeling of moral superiority to the greedy traders and the insensitive missionaries; in this regard, Moore comes closer to Achebe, whose detailed picture of pre-colonial Ibo culture ironically undercuts the "civilizing" goals of the British missionaries.

As the novel opens Laforgue nervously awaits the outcome of a parley between Champlain and the local Jesuit superior on whether to send him deep into the interior of Canada to replace another Jesuit missionary who is thought to have died. He desperately wants to go, even concealing an ear infection lest he be turned down. His companion is to be a young man named Daniel, a seventeenth-century "Jesuit Volunteer" with a secret of his own; Daniel had planned to become a Jesuit himself, but has recently become sexually infatuated with Annuka, the daughter of one of the Algonquin guides who have agreed to accompany the missionaries on the most difficult part of their journey. Thus is set one of the two basic conflicts of the novel. For Laforgue soon discovers Daniel's nightly trysts with Annuka on the journey, but his own sexual excitement in viewing their lovemaking shames him deeply, undermining his sense of moral authority over the boy. Meanwhile, Daniel has determined to marry the girl at any cost, but he reckons without the Savages' abhorrence of such a match, coupled with their decidedly casual attitude toward premarital chastity.

The novel's other major tension is also cultural, but this one cuts much more deeply since it involves a conflict of world views that makes Black Robe and Savage incomprehensible to one another. The girl's father, Chomina, puts it most succinctly to Laforgue shortly before he dies: "It is because you Normans are deaf and blind that you think this world is a world of darkness and the world of the dead is a world of light. We who can hear the forest and the river's warnings, we who speak with the animals and the fish and respect their bones, we know that it is not the truth. If you have come here to change us, you are stupid. We know the truth. This world is a cruel place, but it is the sunlight. And I grieve now for I am leaving it."

At the end of the novel, this ideological divide threatens to swallow up Laforgue's own soul. After capture and torture by the Iroquois, helped along by Daniel and Annuka, Laforgue finally reaches his destination only to find the Huron village riddled with fever, one of the Jesuits dead, and the other half-paralyzed with a stroke. A brief (and convenient) eclipse of the sun combined with the sudden (equally handy) recovery of several Christian villagers convince the Hurons to accept the "water sorcery" of baptism, but not before one outraged Savage tomahawks the paralyzed Jesuit. Laforgue is left alone with the classic missionary dilemma: Is the Indians' superstition and fear of death sufficient grounds to justify a mass baptism? And does his own spiritual aridity and near despair disqualify him as a minister of God's mercy?

Like the renegade abbot at the end of Moore's earlier novel, *Catholics*, Laforgue resolves the dilemma not on the basis of theological abstraction, but in response to the Indians' plea for help. The Huron chief counters Laforgue's scruples about baptism without instruction with a catechism of his own:

"I ask you now, are you our enemy?"

"No."

"Do you love us?"

"Yes."

"Then baptize us."

And as he does so, Laforgue finds himself capable finally of an authentic prayer: "Spare them. Spare them, O Lord."

Moore's conviction here, and in *Catholics*, coincides with Endo's: loving our neighbor is more important than converting him, a nostrum dangerously close to a bland humanitarianism unless it emerges, as it does for the characters in these novels, from the crucible of passionate commitment and intense suffering. Rodrigues apostasizes to save others from cruel torments; Laforgue baptizes to express his desire to love the "Savages" with whom he will spend his life.

Of the two novels and the two priests, I found Endo's more compelling, perhaps because the stakes seemed higher and the interior drama richer in detail. But Moore's *Black Robe* has the merit of taking seriously the ambiguities both of the Native American culture and of the missionary impulse; pious and impious stereotypes can thus be retired to the lumber room of history.

The mandarins of Moscow

RETHINKING THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE
POLITICS AND HISTORY SINCE 1947
Stephen F. Cohen
Oxford, $17.95, 222 pp.

Louis Menashe

THIS valuable volume brings together four of Stephen Cohen's stimulating, often sparkling essays on aspects of Soviet history and politics. The topics range from Stalinism (a major preoccupation, for good reason) to the tug of war between reformers and conservatives that shapes so much of contemporary Soviet life.

Cohen has also added a fine critical introduction to his own trade, a survey of the work produced by the many toilers in Soviet fields, beginning with the expansion of academic Sovietology in the classical epoch of the Cold War down to its comeback in recent years. Cohen describes a transition from a smug conformity, anti-Soviet in impulse, at the early end, to the break-up of orthodoxy, a softening of anti-Soviet attitudes, and a greater analytical complexity at the other end. For the layman, this essay is doubtless the most accessible and the most informative. Among other things, Cohen demonstrates the connection between the

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rhythms of scholarly Sovietology and wider currents in the U.S. Did you know, for example, that from the 1950s to 1977 "all contributors to the government journal *Problems of Communism*, which regularly featured most of the prominent Sovietologists of the period" required secret security clearance before their work could be published?

The atmosphere of détente, the credibility crises (Vietnam, Watergate), the rise of a New Left, new trends in general scholarship (social history, behaviorist political science) — all helped to generate new ways of looking at the USSR. Stereotypes began to topple. The Bolshevik Revolution was not a machination of a nasty elite, but a consequence of a mass movement; Stalinism was not an inevitable denouement of Leninism, but its monstrous aberrant (something the poor Trotskyists had argued all along); a dynamic, or as Cohen writes, "fractious" political life pulsed behind the ostensibly smooth totalitarian façade, and so on. The new work adds up to a revisionist view of the Soviet experience and Cohen describes his book, somewhat grandiosely, as "the most general effort to date in the revisionist cause."

There are revisionisms and revisionisms. One type, the kind we usually have in mind when the term is used, attempts to displace an earlier consensus *in toto*. The revisionist historians of the Great War sought to reverse the accepted view of German guilt by distributing the blame elsewhere. The revisionist historians of the Cold War attempted to shift the sources of truculence from Moscow to Washington. Lately, the term has been applied to those who deny the Holocaust ever took place. Cohen's brand of revisionism is not absolutist. It does not strive to prove that the Soviet bear is really a pussycat, that Stalinism was just another form of modernization, or that the present-day USSR is really a pluralist society. Such formulations would constitute a variety of Soviet apologetics; they are not the open-minded, historically informed, and nuanced inquiries Cohen is after.

Soviet authorities have barred Cohen from visiting the USSR since 1982. Perhaps it is because of his contacts with some dissidents, or because he has championed the cause of the condemned Bukharin, a victim of Stalin the Soviets stubbornly refuse to rehabilitate. Who knows? Sometimes Moscow has a hard time distinguishing friends from enemies. I mention Cohen's problems with the commissariat of Soviet visas to point up another feature of his revisionism: it is hard to place, politically. Is it, to use the simplified categories we can't escape, pro- or anti-Soviet? (Several letter-writers to *The Nation*, where Cohen contributes a monthly column, concur with Moscow on the latter interpretation.) It is difficult, because of the prevailing political passions of our time, to treat the Soviet Union in a scholarly way without advertising overtly or between the lines one's own attitudes and preferences. More: analysis of the USSR becomes a moral judgment. In the simpler times of the Cold War, when Western scholarship on the USSR was convinced of the essential malevolence of its subject, there was little room for am-

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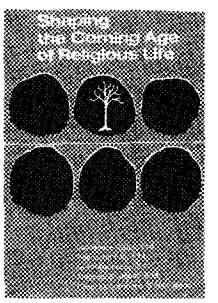

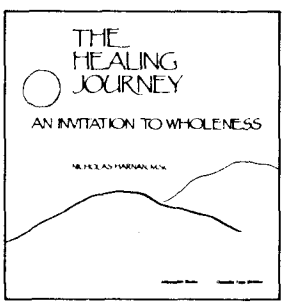

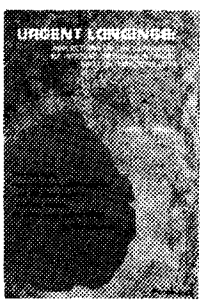

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The main obstacle to further reform in the Soviet Union is not one or another generation, institution, elite, group or leader, but the profound conservatism that seems to dominate almost all of them, from the family to the Politburo, from local authorities to the state. . . . Put simply, the Soviet Union has become, both "downstairs" in society and "upstairs" in the political system, one of the most conservative countries in the world.

—Stephen F. Cohen
Rethinking the Soviet Experience

biguity. The unified, monochromatic theory of totalitarianism possessed an economy and logic that was impressive. The USSR was an Orwellian structure where an elite hungry for internal and external power was in place over the will (or lack of it) of a huge population.

The totalitarian model was knocked into a cocked hat by the Khrushchev de-Stalinization program. Change had been banished from the steppes in the totalitarian interpretation — permanent purge, permanent terror, permanent one-man tyranny. Now, clearly, renovations in Soviet society and politics seriously modified the coarser characteristics of Stalinism; change was palpable. Those with an animus against the USSR did not stop worrying, did not learn to love it. Instead, they adjusted their own theory in order to retain their animadversion; they went on to describe "the new face of Soviet totalitarianism," to cite the title of one mainstream study. Others, like Cohen — I place myself in the camp that shares his sensibility — take de-Stalinization as a sign of hope about the Soviet present and future. (What is it about us? We like Russians? We weep over the traumas of Russian history? We understand that the "focus of evil" in the modern world is not the USSR?) This hope was projected back onto the past. If the Sovietological profession failed to understand the present, perhaps there was much overlooked in the past. Enter revisionism.

But it must be admitted that this kind of revisionism puts one between the brick walls of the Kremlin and a very hard place. Painful ambiguities and a straining for points plague the arguments, as some sections of Cohen's essays reveal. Sometimes the line between explaining and explaining away becomes very thin. If the new social historians tell us that Stalinism, past and present, rules not simply by force but by a sort of populist or nativist consensus as well, it may chip at the totalitarian model, but it is not a very comforting truth about Soviet society. Bukharin, about whom Cohen published a landmark political biography, may have stood for a programmatic alternative to Stalinism, but the striking thing is Stalin's victory, not Bukharin's alternative. (Here I'm afraid I subscribe to a "big battalions" view of history. Perhaps any student of Soviet history must. Stalin: "How many divisions does the pope have?") It is also a bit disingenuous to stress the discontinuity between Lenin and Stalin. The late economic historian, Alexander Ehrlich, once observed wryly that Stalinism didn't spring from Buddhism. Stalin thought of himself as a good Leninist, and many, alas, agreed. Clearly, there was more than Stalinist legerdemain linking the two.

And what about Soviet external behavior, a subject Cohen does not address in this volume, except to plead for détente on the grounds that it encourages liberalization of Soviet society? One hopes there is a connection, and there is considerable evidence that in many osmotic ways the two are mutually reinforcing. But it is a fact that the Brezhnev leadership that stood for détente also throttled dissidence and invaded Czechoslovakia.

Those of us who hope for the best grow impatient. Soviet leaders come and go, the younger, more vigorous ones, and the older immobile types (Brezhnev was both), and still fundamental sameness outweighs fundamental change, despite the numerous reforms that take place in all corners of Soviet life. What explains this? Often we have to fall back not on some novel revisionist idea, but, as Cohen does, on an old argument — the endurance of the "Russian tradition," from Tsars to Soviets. If so, then the study of the USSR is, like all history, a study of contexts, an examination of unique configurations. Cohen approaches matters this way, but occasionally in his eagerness to humanize or universalize the enigmatic Russians, he slips into facile analogies or metaphors — Soviet conservatives become U.S. Republicans or British Tories.

Rarely does Cohen present a problem without a feel for its complexity; his answers are not blithely offered and his generalizations are usually tagged with cautionary notes. His book is alive with analytical tensions, with arguments from many diverse sources arrayed against one another. We need more of this kind of work in the ongoing effort to think and rethink the Soviet experience.

Something to be ashamed of

THE TENTH MAN

Graham Greene

Simon and Schuster, $14.95, 157 pp.

Elizabeth Christman

IT sounds like the beginning of a novel: an old manuscript by a famous author, buried in a file for forty years, suddenly comes to light. This romantic scenario, however, is real. Graham Greene at eighty has just published *The Tenth Man*, written under contract for MGM right after World War II, never filmed, forgotten even by the author. Three years ago an MGM official found it, and the studio sold publication rights to British publisher Anthony Blond.

Greene heard of the find when Anthony Blond asked him if he wanted to make any editorial changes before the book was published. He remembered it as only a sketched idea, was astonished to receive the complete short novel of about 30,000 words, and even more astonished to find he liked it.

Greene's admirers will like it too. Though short and somewhat undevel-

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oped, it's pure Greene. The protagonist is a hallmark Greene type, a middle-aged man weighed down with guilt and failure. Louis Chavel, a prosperous widowed lawyer from Paris, has been held prisoner by the Germans in occupied France. As retribution for some civil murders, the Germans decree that one man in every ten is to be executed. It is up to the prisoners to choose the victim. In a lottery Chavel draws the slip of paper with the cross on it. Immediately he offers to deed his home near Paris and all his property to anyone who will take his place. A young clerk nicknamed Janvier sells his life so as to leave his mother and sister rich. Next morning Janvier is executed.

This opening drama, comprising about a fifth of the novel, simply sets up the situation. The real story begins when Chavel goes back to Paris after the German defeat, having grown a beard and taken a new identity and a new name, Charlot. He is poor now. He has no office, no home. He is so ashamed of the way he saved his own skin that he can't look up any former friends or business associates. He can't get a job. He goes to his old home, where Janvier's sister and ill mother are now living, presenting himself as Charlot, a fellow-prisoner of the dead man. Thérèse Mangeot, the sister, hires him as a sort of servant, and he begins to fall in love with her. It's a hopeless love, however, for he cannot tell her that he is the man she hates so bitterly for buying her brother's life. She keeps a gun ready to kill Chavel whenever he turns up, and she is sure he eventually will.

The plot has fascinating turns and complications, managed with Greene's economical deftness. It is a plotty story, of course: it was written for a movie. There are some fortuitous coincidences. For example, Charlot (as he is called from the time he changes his name) is despondently leaning against a urinal on a Paris street when he is offered a commission by a disembodied voice. It is one M. Carosse, hiding inside the urinal for fear of being spotted as a collaborationist, who mistakes Charlot for someone else. This encounter, combined with the remarkable coincidence that M. Carosse happens to overhear on another occasion the details of the prison bargain, furnishes such an engrossing plot development that one hardly stops to question the fortuitous linking of events.

Character portrayal is sketchy. Greene gives no satisfactory analysis of why the middle-aged, childless widower wants so passionately to live. Still more shadowy is young Janvier's motive for giving up his life to enrich his mother and sister, who are not desperately poor. There are a couple of throwaway hints. Janvier coughs a lot; perhaps he knows he's going to die soon anyway. He and his sister are twins, with an exceptional bond between them; perhaps giving his life for her is almost like saving a part of himself. Greene might have fleshed out these hints if he had had novel publication rather than a movie in view.

Once past the spare beginning, Greene unfolds more spaciously the consciousness of a man running or hiding from a disgraceful moral failure. No writer is better than Greene at dramatizing moral

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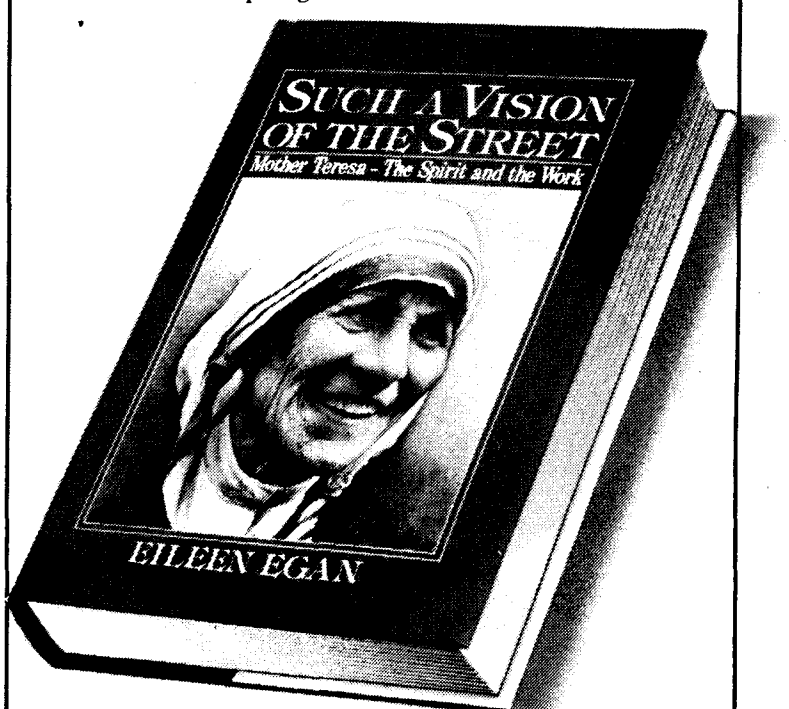

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failure or at tracing its effects down the years on a man's life. Charlot sees his own bearded face reflected in a water decanter. "It was the face of failure. It was odd, he thought, that one failure of nerve had ingrained the face as deeply as a tramp's, but, of course, he had the objectivity to tell himself, it wasn't one failure, it was a whole lifetime of preparation for the event."

Charlot is like Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* who has betrayed both his wife and his mistress; like the whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory* who has had an illegitimate child; like Rowe in *The Ministry of Fear* who has killed his wife in pity for her sufferings. Like these other protagonists, Charlot finds a way to atone for the evil he committed — a drastic atonement, but then it was a drastic act, buying a man's life.

The Tenth Man is not a Graham Greene masterpiece, but it is a welcome addition to the canon.

The biggest domino

DISTANT NEIGHBORS
A PORTRAIT OF THE MEXICANS
Alan Riding
Knopf, $18.95, 385 pp.

Joseph A. Page

ALAN RIDING'S *Distant Neighbors* is both less and more than a social history in the distinguished tradition of "people books" such as Luigi Barzini's *The Italians* and Theodore Zeldin's *The French*. It lacks a certain richness of detail and does not fully illuminate the Mexican culture, but Riding has a different objective in mind and he succeeds admirably in reaching it. His focus, as befits a first-rate foreign correspondent, is upon recent political trends and the critical dilemmas which are rapidly overtaking the Mexican nation. There is a sense of urgency to his portrayal of the shared commonality and diversity of the Mexicans. For Riding these are keys to an understanding of a crisis which may be the most serious the country has confronted since its Revolution in the second decade of this century. Central America may monopolize today's headlines, but Riding convincingly demonstrates that in the long run it is Mexico that ought to give us a deeper concern.

Stability, achieved after the consolidation of the Revolution, has long set Mexico apart from the rest of Latin America. A series of presidents coming from the ranks of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (or PRI, its initials in Spanish), wielding virtually absolute authority, serving six-year terms without the possibility of re-election and then choosing their own successors, have ruled the country in an unbroken sequence since 1934. Exercising tight control over the electoral process, the PRI has seen to it that the political opposition remains powerless. The government uses revolutionary, anti-imperialist rhetoric both at home and in foreign-policy posturing, as well as occasional doses of repression, to keep the left from achieving any degree of popular support.

In the decades following World War II the Mexican economy expanded at a six-percent rate. Foreign investment helped fuel a surge of industrialization which many felt provided a model for other developing nations. Proximity to the United States eliminated the need for an expensive and potentially politically intrusive military establishment, facilitated tourism (Mexico's lucrative "industry without chimney") and permitted the exodus of surplus migrant workers.

But in the 1970s the system began to unravel. The discovery of large oil re-

REVIEWERS

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serves proved to be a bane of untold proportions. It gave impetus to what Riding terms a "veritable fiesta of borrowing" and an orgy of corruption which diverted petroleum revenues into private pockets. The disastrous developmental policies adopted by the government left the economy in shambles and created a foreign debt of $80 billion. At the same time the population surged rapidly, reaching 77 million in 1984 and creating a need for social services which cannot be satisfied. Mexico City, overwhelmed by its 17 million inhabitants, has come to symbolize the urban nightmare.

A crisis of confidence now besets the Mexican nation. One-party rule seems no longer able to cope. A strong conservative opposition party supported by large segments of the middle class has become a credible threat to the PRI. The high-handed measures to which the government has customarily resorted when challenged may not work this time. And yet, as Riding points out, "The cost of appeasing the middle classes would be the worsening of the living conditions of the great majority of Mexicans. . . ." A veer to the right would surely provoke labor, peasant, and student protests.

The strength of *Distant Neighbors* lies in its explanation of the roots and parameters of the crisis. Riding dissects the Mexican establishment and describes the system of relationships which enables the government to control, and at the same time share power with, institutions such as organized labor, the bureaucracy, the private sector, and the church. The president, who appears to exercise absolute authority, in fact must strive to achieve conciliation and consensus. His task is to keep the various interest groups committed to the preservation of the status quo. "The system's credibility," Riding notes, "must be preserved in almost schizophrenic fashion: those on the outside must believe in its authoritarianism, with those on the inside convinced of its flexibility."

An essential component of the system — its oil and its glue, to borrow Riding's terms — is corruption. In perhaps the most striking chapter of the book, he analyzes the pervasiveness of illegal self-enrichment, a mode of behavior found not only in government but at every level of Mexican society. Nepotism, conflict of interest, and the peddling of influence are considered normal practices. Public service is an opportunity to milk as much financial gain as possible. Bribery is a customary way of getting things done.

Scandals associated with the administrations of Mexico's last two presidents, Luis Echeverria and Jose Lopez Portillo, have caused many Mexicans for the first time to link corruption and bad government. The current president, Miguel de la Madrid, has taken some steps to put an end to excessively corrupt practices, but as Riding acutely notes, these were political rather than moral measures, efforts to restore the smooth functioning of the system rather than to reform habits that have existed for centuries.

Riding's discussion of the ties between the United States and Mexico is valuable for its emphasis upon the need for respect which is deeply felt on the Mexican side. He points out the consistent failure of American officials to grasp the psychological aspects of the relationship and is especially critical of the current U.S. ambassador in Mexico City, former movie actor John Gavin.

The "domino theory" as applied to Central America posits that a series of upheavals spreading northward from El Salvador could destabilize Mexico. *Distant Neighbors* demonstrates that the real threat to Mexico comes from within. Alan Riding deserves much credit for enabling readers to appreciate why Mexico has reached a crossroads. The Mexicans must work out their own future, but they will need understanding and cooperation from their "distant neighbors" to the north.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 292)

philosophical concepts can be used with precision (January 24, 1985).

As for myself, I have been assistant vice-president of St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City, as well as assistant administrator at Bellevue Hospital and City Hospital Center at Elmhurst in Queens. I also worked as an assistant director at the United Hospital Fund. I have been studying for three years at Union Theological Seminary, concentrating in ethics, with adjunct work at the Columbia School of Public Health, and I plan to specialize in the ethics of health care administration, which I now teach at the Columbia School of Public Health. I spend considerable amounts of my waking hours working on effective ways to bring the ethical issues inherent in modern day health care to the attention of the professional and larger community, and I would welcome correspondence from Dr. White on the subject.

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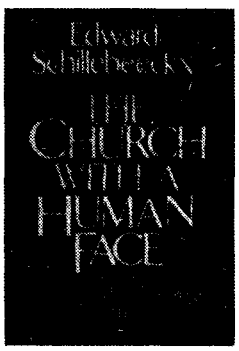

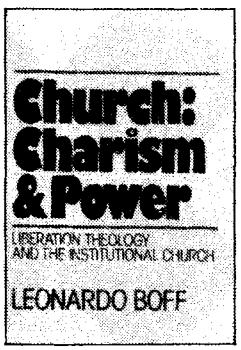

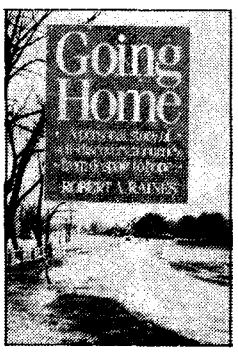

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